The New Criterion

April 2002

A monthly review *edited by Hilton Kramer*

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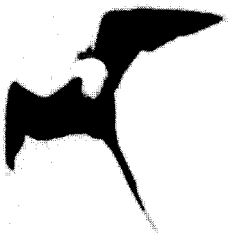

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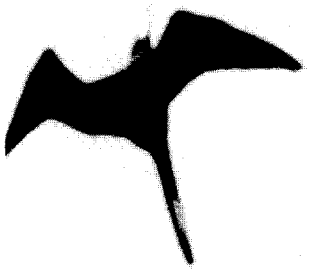

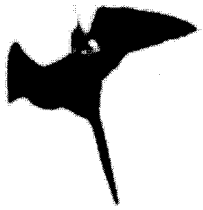

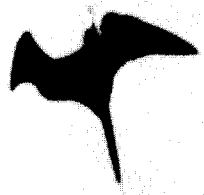

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Editor & Publisher *Hilton Kramer*
Managing Editor *Roger Kimball*
Poetry Editor *Robert Richman*
Associate Editor *James Panero*
Assistant to the Editors *Sara E. Lussier*
Technical Associate *Max Watman*
Editorial Intern *Christopher Swetala*

Publisher 1982–1994 *Samuel Lipman*

Contributors to this issue

Brooke Allen reviews books regularly for *The New Criterion*, *The Wall Street Journal*, and other publications.

Mark Bauerlein's latest book is *Negrophobia: A Race Riot in Atlanta 1906* (Encounter Books). He teaches at Emory University.

James Bowman is the American editor of the London *Times Literary Supplement*.

Paul Dean is Head of English at Dragon School, Oxford and a Fellow of the English Association.

John Derbyshire is writing a book about the Riemann Hypothesis.

Timothy Fuller is Lloyd E. Worner Distinguished Service Professor and Professor of Political Science at Colorado College.

Daniel Kunitz writes about art regularly for *The New Criterion*.

Robert Messenger is the culture editor of *The New York Sun*.

Moore Moran's *Firebreaks* won the National Poetry Book Award for 1999.

Francis Morrone's *Architectural Guidebook to New York City* is available from Gibbs Smith.

Jay Nordlinger is the managing editor and music critic of *National Review*.

Diana Schaub is associate professor and chair of the political science department at Loyola College in Maryland.

Patrick J. Smith is a former editor of *Opera News*.

Mark Steyn is the senior North American correspondent for Britain's Telegraph Group. His most recent book is *Broadway Babies Say Goodnight* (Routledge).

Charles Tomlinson's most recent volumes are *Selected Poems* (New Directions) and *Jubilation* (Oxford).

Karen Wilkin's latest book is *Clement Greenberg: A Critic's Collection* (Princeton).

Keith Windschuttle's *The Killing of History: How Literary Critics and Social Theorists Are Murdering Our Past* has been reissued by Encounter Books.

Published monthly except July and August by The Foundation for Cultural Review, Inc., 850 Seventh Avenue, New York, NY 10019, a nonprofit public foundation as described in Section 501 (c) (3) of the Internal Revenue code, which solicits and accepts contributions from a wide range of sources, including public and private foundations, corporations, and the general public. ISSN 0734-0222. April 2002, Volume 20, Number 8. Subscriptions: $42 for one year, $78 for two. For Canada and Mexico, add $7 per year. Outside North America, add $14 per year. Periodicals postage paid at New York, NY, and at additional mailing offices. Postmaster and subscribers: send change of address, all remittances, and subscription inquiries to The New Criterion, P.O. Box 3000, Denville, NJ 07834. Copyright © 2002 by The Foundation for Cultural Review, Inc. Newsstand distribution by Eastern News Distributors, Inc., One Media Way, 12406 Rt. 250, Milan, OH 44846. (800) 221-3148. Available in microfilm from University Microfilms, 300 N. Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106. All correspondence should be addressed to The New Criterion, 850 Seventh Avenue, New York, NY 10019. (212) 247-6980. Notice of nonreceipt must be sent to the Office Manager within three months of the issue date. **Internet: http://www.newcriterion.com Email: letters@newcriterion.com**

Advertising: Fred Stern, 44 Paulin Boulevard, Leonia, NJ 07605. (201) 947-2674.
Subscriptions: To subscribe, renew, or report a problem please call (800) 783-4903.

The New Criterion is designed by Alvin and James Eisenman. It is set in 10-point Galliard and is printed by Science Press in Ephrata, Pennsylvania, USA.

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Notes & Comments: April 2002

Rise of the Eurocrats

We trust that most of our readers will remember Article IV of the Constitution of the United States:

> The right of the people to be secure in their persons, houses, papers, and effects, against unreasonable searches and seizures, shall not be violated, and no warrants shall issue, but upon probable cause, supported by oath or affirmation, and particularly describing the place to be searched, and the persons or things to be seized.

Protection against "unreasonable searches and seizures" is a bedrock of democratic society. That protection is now under serious assault in Europe.

In a sobering story published in *The Wall Street Journal* on March 1, we learned that European Union anti-trust investigators may conduct dawn raids, without a search warrant, to look for incriminating evidence. "EU antitrust agents," the story reported,

> can walk without warning into any company doing business in the fifteen-nation union to look for whatever they think might be proof of illegal activity. Then they can use the evidence to levy fines as steep as 10 percent of a company's world-wide revenue.
>
> There is no judicial review before what's known as a dawn raid and no statute prescribing when the raids should be conducted. In fact, judges don't have the authority to question, or even see, the justification for a raid. The only approval needed is from the EU's antitrust chief, Mario Monti, who usually bases his decision on whether the haul of evidence will likely be big enough to justify the time and expense.

It is bad enough—we find it frankly intolerable—that the EU document police should be empowered to conduct arbitrary searches of places of business and levy enormous fines. (Volkswagen, for example, was fined $78 million in 2000.) But Mr. Monti is not content with the present scope of his powers. As the story in the *Journal* explained, investigations are currently "limited to searching corporate offices for evidence of price fixing and abuse of market power." Mr. Monti wants far more sweeping powers. He wants, for example, to be able to raid executives' homes at will. He also wants to be able to interrogate employees, without guaranteeing them the right to a lawyer or the right to remain silent.

We are astonished that this development has not sparked angry protests across Europe. Who, after all, are these document police? Today, they are empowered to swoop down on your place of business without a moment's notice and rifle through your files and personal effects.

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Tomorrow that power may well extend to your home. Who are these avengers? They are unelected bureaucrats, accountable to no one but themselves. They meet in secret. They issue unappealable diktats. They are enemies of democracy and freedom. Why are they tolerated?

Discussing this story with an English friend, we were struck by his observation that Europe at the beginning of 2002 is roughly in the same place on the road to totalitarianism that Europe was in 1930. It is worth stressing that a totalitarian government need not be a nasty government. It is, however, an arbitrary and undemocratic government. Communism and fascism were nasty as well as arbitrary. The EU, in its current configuration, is merely arrogant and intrusive. It has, as yet, no jackbooted shock troopers. But it does possess a multitude of regulation-issuing bureaucrats and, increasingly, squads of lawyers and "investigators" with police power. Where will it stop? We wonder. In Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking-Glass*, the nonsense poem "The Walrus and the Carpenter" tells the story of how the title characters entice a flock of naïve young oysters from their beds for a lovely stroll along the beach. At first the oysters are reticent. But then, ignoring the warnings of their elders, they start to emerge:

> And thick and fast they came at last,
> And more, and more, and more—
> All hopping through the frothy waves,
> And scrambling to the shore.

Of course, it ends badly for the oysters, who find that the Walrus and the Carpenter had "brought them out so far/ And made them trot so quick" only to make a lunch of them.

> "O Oysters," said the Carpenter,
> "You've had a pleasant run!
> Shall we be trotting home again?"
> But answer came there none—
> And this was scarcely odd, because
> They'd eaten every one.

It was while we were contemplating Mr. Monti and his document police that this poem occurred to us. It seemed strangely apposite. In the section of his biography of Winston Churchill dealing with the years leading up to World War II, William Manchester also quotes the "The Walrus and the Carpenter." Heedless of Churchill's warnings about the threat of Hitler, Neville Chamberlain and many other well-intentioned people looked the other way, manufactured excuses, and waved documents that they said promised "peace in our time":

> "Now, if you're ready, Oysters dear,
> We can begin to feed."
>
> "But not on us!" the Oysters cried,
> Turning a little blue.
> "After such kindness, that would be
> A dismal thing to do."

It was, alas, too late for them, but perhaps their fellows back home learned a lesson. Have we?

More Britney Spears

In a famous passage toward the beginning of Robert Musil's great novel *The Man Without Qualities*, there is a moment of what we might call negative awakening. The novel's protagonist—a bright, unanchored young man named Ulrich—began life determined to distinguish himself in some conspicuous way. That all changed the day he happened to see a racehorse described as "a racehorse of genius." If a racehorse can be a "genius," what notice could Ulrich hope to achieve for his own efforts? The triumph of trivialization, he decided, had rendered his ambitions ridiculous.

We have often had occasion to reflect on Ulrich and that racehorse. Doubtless he was wrong to abandon culture because culture abandoned him. On strong characters, such depredations act as a spur, not a sedative. But if we must regret Ulrich's lack of

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resolution we may still sympathize with the feelings that lay behind it. What if Ulrich were with us today, when we boast not only racehorses but also pop stars and performance artists of "genius"? The trek toward trivialization that Musil descried in the late 1920s has become an all-out race toward an ever-receding bottom.

What prompted this gloomy thought was the news that John Rockwell, head of *The New York Times*'s Sunday Arts & Leisure section, would be stepping down. Most longtime readers of the *Times* will remember Mr. Rockwell chiefly as a former rock critic. He has written about classical music and other cultural matters, too, where his tastes lean heavily toward the avant-garde. But it is as a champion of pop music that he really made his name. And it was as a champion of the pop sensibility writ large that he presided over the coverage of culture and the arts at our paper of record. Mr. Rockwell will step into the newly created post of "senior cultural correspondent." The word is that Howell Raines, the *Times*'s new executive editor, was happy to replace Mr. Rockwell. But why? Could it be that Mr. Raines is bringing a new air of seriousness to the *Times*? After all, to say that the paper's cultural coverage has gone down-market in recent years is like saying that Enron has an image problem.

Coverage of ideas and the arts in *The New York Times* has been dumbed down, thinned out, tarted up, and generally transformed into a species of advertising copy. Readers given to metaphysical speculation have often embarrassed themselves with predictions that the nadir had been reached when, lo! next week's paper appeared and was even worse than the week before. Even as we write, an international team of philosophers is said to be deliberating about whether to name a new paradox after the *Times*: just as Zeno gave the world thorny paradoxes about motion, so *The New York Times* has given us the spectacle of constant declivity without destination.

This remarkable performance has been the work of many hands, of course, but John Rockwell must be given a significant share of the credit—if "credit" is the word we want. He indubitably has the common touch. So it would be entirely understandable if a new management, determined to deepen the paper's cultural coverage, should look beyond Mr. Rockwell.

We were amazed, then, to learn that, for Howell Raines, the problem with John Rockwell was not that he was too demotic, too pop- and celebrity-oriented but, on the contrary, that he was not pop- and celebrity-oriented enough. The irony of the situation was not lost on Mr. Rockwell. "Howell thought that [Arts & Leisure] was esoteric, boring and that nobody read it," he said in a recent interview;

> it wasn't germane or relevant to people's interests. There is a certain irony in this, since I am the former rock critic and since we ran 277 stories about movies last year. . . . We did a lot of stories about popular music and about popular culture; we put pop singers and stuff on the cover.

And how! But were there enough pop singers on the cover? The criticism of high culture in the *Times* was poor, it was threadbare, it was spotty: but was it poor, threadbare, and spotty enough? An article about Mr. Rockwell's reassignment in the February 18 issue of *The New York Observer* quoted an unnamed *Times* reporter who said "with Arts & Leisure, we need less Peking Opera and more Britney Spears." Robert Musil's Ulrich would know just where he was with a statement like that. Yesterday it was the race horse of genius; today it's the pubescent pop star. Tomorrow? Second-guessing what the *Times* will do is a mug's game. Who know what unexplored avenues of trivialization are left to champion? All we can be sure of is that, misstep by misstep, the *Times* is gradually preparing its own irrelevance.

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The survival of culture: VIII

The pillars of the temple of liberty

by Diana Schaub

At what point shall we expect the approach of danger? By what means shall we fortify against it? Shall we expect some transatlantic military giant, to step the Ocean, and crush us at a blow? Never! All the armies of Europe, Asia and Africa combined, with all the treasure of the earth (our own excepted) in their military chest; with a Buonaparte for a commander, could not by force, take a drink from the Ohio, or make a track on the Blue Ridge, in a trial of a thousand years.

—Abraham Lincoln, Address before the Springfield Young Men's Lyceum, 1838

Are we to think that September 11 proved Lincoln wrong? Certainly, there are many Americans who now feel vulnerable. In losing their sense of security, they may also have lost their sense of American exceptionalism. While it might have been true that America was once geographically blessed, our moated fortress is no longer unbreachable. Nature's gift has been undone by our own technological ingenuity. It does not even require an intercontinental ballistic missile to "step the Ocean"—an airplane will do. A few foresighted observers had long (and unavailingly) warned that the advances of modernity might be turned against us by anti-modern crusaders who would take a sick delight in the irony of such death-dealing. It seems that in the future our protection will depend more on ourselves than on Providence, and will largely be a matter of defending ourselves against the vicious application of our own inventions, devices, appliances, and agents.

At the start of the Lyceum Address—the most profound meditation we have on the perpetuation of our political institutions—Lincoln says that each post-founding generation has two tasks: to transmit the possession of "this goodly land . . . unprofaned by the foot of an invader" and to transmit the "political edifice of liberty and equal rights . . . undecayed by the lapse of time, and untorn by usurpation." The attack on September 11 was a profanation. By the standards of world history, it was a minor one, but not so in the American collective consciousness. Yet the fact that we can express the sum total of our experience of foreign attack with such concision—December 7 and September 11—is a testament still to American exceptionalism. No enemy is marching along the Blue Ridge and, I daresay, none will be. Thus, it seems to me that Lincoln is still essentially correct. There is no American equivalent of the Fall of France, the Battle of Britain, the Siege of Stalingrad, or the Austrian Anschluss. What we have are two infamous days—days that stir us to such anger and overwhelming counterattack that they are not soon repeated. Moreover, it is worth remembering that the Islamic militants do not have in view a takeover of America; they left a footprint intended to insult and panic us, but have no plan (or at least no reasonable expectation) of placing a jackboot on our supine neck forever. Their

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tyrannical aspirations are directed closer to home where they are engaged in an intra-Islamic struggle. If they hoped to provoke our withdrawal from the Arabian Peninsula, they chose a singularly stupid tactic that may well prove suicidal not just for the bombers but for the movement as a whole. The enshrinement of suicide at the heart of an enterprise is likely to become a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Lincoln believed that the task of maintaining "the political edifice of liberty and equal rights" against the twin threats of "time" and "usurpation" was a much more daunting task than that of protecting the land from invaders. Here is what he says:

> At what point then is the approach of danger to be expected? I answer, if it ever reach us, it must spring up amongst us. It cannot come from abroad. If destruction be our lot, we must ourselves be its author and finisher.

In the immediate wake of September 11, there was a worry that we would harm ourselves (and grant the terrorists a victory) if we allowed the fear of further attack to alter our way of life. We were cautioned against curtailing either our civil liberties or our spending habits (hence, zero-percent financing on a new car to "Keep America Rolling"). This attitude of hardy disdain has much to recommend it. It was the first reaction of Londoners to the Blitz. In *Their Finest Hour*, Churchill says that "everybody went about his business and pleasure and dined and slept as he usually did. The theatres were full, and the darkened streets were crowded with casual traffic." Although the wisdom of taking sensible precautions soon become apparent, Churchill describes that initial refusal to admit disruption as "a healthy reaction," far superior to "the frightful squawk which the defeatist elements in Paris had put up on the occasion when they were first seriously raided."

Civil libertarians want to tough it out as well. What they fear more than loss of American lives is that certain forms of self-defense will grant a lasting and insidious victory to the enemy. They worry about self-inflicted damage to the system—a kind of home-front equivalent of "friendly fire."

It is already obvious that the terrorists know how to manipulate our political system (especially the freedom to travel and the protections of the person against arbitrary search, seizure, and arrest) just as they know how to manipulate our technology. They would use liberty to undermine liberty.

It is already obvious that the terrorists know how to manipulate our political system (especially the freedom to travel and the protections of the person against arbitrary search, seizure, and arrest) just as they know how to manipulate our technology. They would use liberty to undermine liberty. Hitler's exploitation of legality to bring about the collapse of the Weimar regime is the classic example of democracy's liability to subversion. Must we accept that this is a vulnerability inseparable from our form of government? In the name of liberty, must we allow liberty to be abused? Or can we defend liberty without sacrificing or sullying the end for which we are fighting by the means that unscrupulous enemies make necessary?

Given that Lincoln was himself willing to use strong measures against saboteurs, it does not seem that his fears of self-inflicted damage were the same as the ACLU's. It is good to remember what Lincoln said in defense of his suspension of the privilege of the writ of habeas corpus (in accord with Article 1, section 9 of the Constitution which explicitly allows for such suspension "when in Cases of Rebellion or Invasion the public Safety may require it"). Lincoln

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compared the measure, in his strikingly homely fashion, to an emetic. He did not anticipate any permanent damage from the use of emergency powers, since he didn't believe either individuals or nations develop a taste for foul medicines:

> Nor am I able to appreciate the danger . . . that the American people will, by means of military arrests during the rebellion, lose the right of public discussion, the liberty of speech and the press, the law of evidence, trial by jury, and Habeas corpus, throughout the indefinite peaceful future which I trust lies before them, any more than I am able to believe that a man could contract so strong an appetite for emetics during temporary illness, as to persist in feeding upon them through the remainder of his healthful life.

Lincoln may be right, but what gives one pause with respect to the creation of the Office of Homeland Security is that it does not seem to be conceived as a temporary wartime measure. It has all the trappings of a permanent establishment. If Americans are now to understand themselves as under a lasting and indefinite threat, with the home front indistinguishable from the front line, it really would mean a sea-change. While a few of the preparedness measures (e.g., better training and coordination of emergency personnel) are probably smart things to do, I nonetheless suspect that we could (and should) abandon many of the costly and time-consuming security measures, which are both ineffective and insulting. Instead of treating every citizen like a potential terrorist, why not trust to the eagle eyes of the flying public? The necessary virtue is courage—a virtue that does not flourish in overly bureaucratized, overly policed states.

Leaving aside questions about the intended scope and tenure of the Office of Homeland Security, I wonder about the wisdom of pressing into service the term "homeland." It is a word that comes into currency when national survival is at stake and will, I believe, under more normal circumstances, sound overheated. Indeed, even in times of national danger, it is not a term that leaps naturally to the American tongue, perhaps because in a nation of immigrants "homeland" could never have quite the resonance that it has for older, more homogeneous peoples. Even for second-, third-, and fourth-generation Americans, the homeland is the place one's ancestors left. Certainly, "fatherland" and "motherland" have a distinctly un-American ring to them. Filial piety may contribute to American patriotism, but it is not its foundation. Accordingly, American patriotic songs rhapsodize as much about the flag as about the land (witness especially *The Star-Spangled Banner* and *You're a Grand Old Flag*). When they do celebrate the land, it is in unique ways, as in the remarkable verse "This is my country! Land of my choice!" I doubt that a survey of anthems from around the world would produce any equivalent.

Other nations emphasize autochthony: "Thou art the gentle mother of the children of this soil, Beloved land, Brazil" or "Think, beloved fatherland, that heaven gave you a soldier in each son" (Mexico) or "Indonesia, my native land, my place of birth, where I stand guard, over my motherland." America being such a vast, geographically diverse land produces other unusual effects. Lyrical tributes often catalogue the variety: "From the mountains, to the prairies, to the oceans white with foam" or "From California to the New York Islands, from the Redwood Forests to the Gulf Stream waters, this land is made for you and me." The United States could have no equivalent of *Edelweiss*. Yes, *Edelweiss* was written by Rodgers and Hammerstein for *The Sound of Music*; nonetheless, it perfectly captures the rooted character of patriotism in a small, alpine nation. By contrast, American songs convey a bird's-eye view of the whole "from sea to shining sea." The diversity of the land is matched, of course, by the diversity of individuals who choose this land as their own. Woody Guthrie's line "this land is made for you and me" implies that America is broad

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enough (physically and metaphysically) to accommodate both "you" and "me." What transforms you and me into "us" is not a shared nativity, but our pledged allegiance to the flag "and to the republic for which it stands."

Since September 11, there has been a phenomenal resurgence of flag-waving. The symbolic stand-in for the republic stands proud and upright, but how about the republic itself. How—and for what—does the republic stand? Perhaps not as sturdily or as undivided as one would hope. This was Lincoln's worry in 1838 and must still be ours today to the extent that Americans are confused about, ignorant of, contending over, and (whether consciously or not) departing from the founding principles of the republic.

There have been painful recent reminders of our self-division. Witness the flap over the proposed memorial to the New York firefighters who lost their lives at the World Trade Center (briefly discussed in the "Notes and Comments" of the February issue of *The New Criterion*). The commissioned statue was to be based on the widely-circulated photo, first published in the Bergen County *Record*, of three firemen raising an American flag at Ground Zero—a photo strikingly reminiscent of the even more famous photograph of six American servicemen raising the flag at Iwo Jima. The World War II photo was translated into bronze, becoming the U.S. Marine Corps Memorial. The Fire Department of New York wanted a similarly monumental rendering of the image and moment of its heroism. Before casting the scene into bronze, however, it made a decision to change the cast of characters. Instead of the three white firemen of the photo, there were to be one white, one black, and one Hispanic. The recasting, however, met with objections, and then the objections to the recasting met with objections, and soon enough everyone was offended. The most flattering light in which to put the incident would be to say that Americans of all complexions love their flag so much they fight over the honor of raising it (and the honor of dying for it). A less flattering light would reveal how many of our judgments are filtered and distorted by racially polarizing lenses.

In the name of liberty, must we allow liberty to be abused? Or can we defend liberty without sacrificing or sullying the end for which we are fighting by the means that unscrupulous enemies make necessary?

I see no reason to doubt that most of those who object to the photo's alteration do so on principle. They want the statue to reflect the grim and glorious reality of that moment. Those were real men acting in real time. They don't want a gussied up, public relations version. Such "diversity" (which pretends to an inclusiveness and racial proportionality that does not in fact exist in the FDNY) might be fine for recruiting brochures, but the appeal of the photo was in the way it bodied forth inner qualities. It was the soulfulness of the picture that captured the nation's attention. If the flag-raisers had been all black or all female, I trust that the advocates of historical memory would be demanding the same fidelity to the moment and that the photo (despite its superficial unrepresentativeness) would still be regarded as a natural for commemoration. Yet, under the current ideological dispensation, one is not allowed simply to see character. The eye is arrested by the surface. It is color that must be seen. If the rainbow isn't there, it must be added.

Since it is the expression of dedication and heroism that counts, one might ask what difference a little "artistic license" makes. The argument of "artistic license," however, seems stretched since the reason for the change is not aesthetic but political. Those who corrected the photo say they

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wished to pay tribute to all the firefighters who died, some of whom were African-American and Hispanic. Presumably the firefighters were also of varying religion, marital status, sexual orientation, height, handedness, and moral quality. Why is race the relevant category? And if racial designations are so important, must artistic and symbolic renditions be accurate, neither over- nor underrepresenting the twenty-four martyred firemen, out of 343, who were minorities?

Perhaps it would help if we remembered that the purpose of any memorial is to honor the dead, not necessarily to depict them. The photo was of living firemen captured in a spontaneous act of honoring their fallen brothers. It was one degree removed or abstracted from the actual event. By what reasoning must the honor guard mirror the racial composition of the honored dead? If the brotherhood is real, what matters the race of the honorer? It would be suggestive of segregation rather than integration if a black fireman had to be added in order to deliver honor to the fallen black firefighters, since the governing presumption would then be that one can honor only those of one's own hue. It would certainly give new meaning to the term "color guard."

Perhaps what generated most offense was the implication that there was something wrong with the event as it actually transpired. Being airbrushed (or firehosed) out of the picture cannot help but be perceived as a denigration of the individuals involved and, by extension, of white firemen in general (since what was wrong was their race). If the racial homogeneity of the original group constituted an insuperable objection, then the idea of using the photo should have been dropped to avoid the Orwellian insult.

The opponents of political correctness have found some unlikely allies among black commentators. Clarence Page, columnist for the *Chicago Tribune*, has argued that a multiracial memorial would serve only to "mask patterns of discrimination that fire departments have practiced for decades." Since this is a department that is 94 percent white, the monochrome of the photo was not accidental. For the Fire Department of New York to offer a retouched self-presentation, driven by bad conscience, in which minority representation swells from 6 percent to 66 percent is mendacious. Thus, the call for historical accuracy cuts in different directions. The picture that seemed so right—because so expressive of sacrifice and bravery—is now bedimmed and just as likely to be interpreted as evidence of ongoing institutional racism. There are those who would reinstate the white-guy originals not for their originality but for their whiteness. Thereby the memorial would become "exhibit A" in the court of racial opinion, where there is no protection against self-incrimination.

Although as a nation we are often greatly divided on racial matters, rarely is there a straight black/white divide. For that, I suppose, we should be thankful. Despite predictions of eventual "race war" from commentators the likes of Thomas Jefferson and Alexis de Tocqueville, America's racial battles have not, in the main, been racial in the sense of being fought out between the races. They have instead been contests between the holders of alternative understandings of justice and alternative visions of what conduces to racial accord. Like so much else in America, the disputes are fundamentally doctrinal. Happily enough—happy at least for those who believe in the freedom of the mind—race, sex, and class do not turn out to be reliable proxies for viewpoint.

Lincoln, of course, became a protagonist in the greatest of these doctrinal disputes. Already in 1838, well before the rent in the Union became manifest, he warned of the danger of self-destruction: "As a nation of freemen, we must live through all time, or die by suicide." Freedom is invulnerable to all but self-inflicted wounds. It is for this reason that Lincoln agrees with the ancient authors who argued for the priority of domestic over foreign affairs. Again, even more against the modern bias, Lincoln did

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not regard economic matters as the essence of domestic affairs. If the "body politic" can be said to have a soul, then the alimentary is elemental, but subordinate. Subscribing to the "statecraft as soulcraft" school, Lincoln elevated virtue above security (whether economic or physical) and education above defense. Or, rather, he saw virtue and education as the only true means of defense against the twin threats of "time" and "usurpation." Similarly, when *The New Criterion* sponsors an inquiry into the "survival of culture," it expresses a concern not for survival but for culture, or not simply for survival but rather for the survival of a thing that transcends mere survival. As Aristotle noted of the political community, "while it comes into being for the sake of living, it exists for the sake of living well"—"well" being defined as living by law and justice, living nobly rather than richly.

Instead of treating every citizen like a potential terrorist, why not trust to the eagle eyes of the flying public. The necessary virtue is courage—a virtue that does not flourish in overly bureaucratized, overly policed states.

For Lincoln, the perpetuation of our political institutions depends decisively on the rightness of our self-understanding. Indeed, in 1855, Lincoln said he was prepared to withdraw his allegiance should our divarication from orthodoxy go much further. In a letter to a slave-owning friend, he closed with these mordant lines:

> Our progress in degeneracy appears to me to be pretty rapid. As a nation, we began by declaring that "*all men are created equal*." We now practically read it "all men are created equal, *except negroes*." When the Know-Nothings get control, it will read "all men are created equal, except negroes, *and foreigners, and catholics*." When it comes to this I should prefer emigrating to some country where they make no pretence of loving liberty—to Russia, for instance, where despotism can be taken pure, and without the base alloy of hypocracy.

Unlike Jefferson, who wrote so sanguinely of "the progress of the human mind," Lincoln concluded that the mind, or at any rate the American mind, was more likely to retrogress and digress. Principles that had been clearly understood in the beginning (despite their frequent violation in practice) were being lost to sight, covered over, distorted, repudiated, and forgotten (perhaps because of their too-long-permitted violation).

In the Lyceum Address, Lincoln diagnosed the decay brought by "the lapse of time." His metaphor was architectural. He spoke of "the temple of liberty," originally supported by "pillars," now "crumbled away." Those pillars were "the passions of the people" or more precisely the sound which the passions assumed as a result of the impress of "the interesting scenes of the revolution." During the fight for liberty, the people's worst passions were either suppressed (as were "jealousy, envy, and avarice") or redirected outward against the enemy (as was the case with "hate" and "revenge"). Once the fight was over, however, and more especially once the memory of the fight had faded, the base passions lost their structural and supportive form. Lincoln declares that "[p]assion has helped us; but can do so no more. It will in future be our enemy." Lincoln recommends the crafting of wholly new pillars, "hewn from the solid quarry of sober reason."

Although Lincoln's aim is the perpetuation of our political institutions, his method is not that of a historic preservationist. He does not strive to repair or reproduce the original pillars. Perpetuation can be achieved only by a fundamental improvement: the substitution of imperishable reason for perishable passion. Lincoln's de-

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preciation of passion leads him to expect little from the study of history. There can be no lasting appeal to "the scenes of the revolution." The history books cannot inspire patriotism. What rendered those scenes once powerful was the "living history" of the men who figured in them,

> a history bearing the indubitable testimonies of its own authenticity, in the limbs mangled, in the scars of wounds received . . .—a history, too, that could be read and understood alike by all, the wise and the ignorant. . . . But *those* histories are gone. They can be read no more forever. They *were* a fortress of strength; but, what invading foemen could *never do*, the silent artillery of time *has done*.

In keeping with his choice of reason over passion, Lincoln emphasizes the texts that perdure (the Declaration, Constitution, and laws) rather than the vanishing "scenes of the revolution." He favors the word over the spectacle. His discipline is political philosophy, not history.

Lincoln's new pillars would demand much more of the people. While the passions of the people were sufficient to erect the political edifice, its maintenance will depend on "their judgment." Self-government begins with the self. A well-ordered state cannot be formed out of disordered individuals. Here again, Lincoln runs counter to the modern claim that private vice can conduce to public benefits if only the vices be ingeniously arrayed. From Machiavelli to Kant, we have been promised that moderation will be the automatic, systemic consequence of immoderate, competitive interaction—no need for the old-fashioned version of moderation which consisted in the habit of saying no to the desires. Lincoln's paean to the rulership of reason in the individual soul calls for reason to be molded into three qualities: "*general intelligence, sound morality* and, in particular, *a reverence for the constitution and laws*." The last of these, which allies reason with reverence, is the most intriguing. Whereas scenes and spectacles fade over time, words and texts can acquire greater force, taking on an almost scriptural status. It is as if religious feeling is transposed onto the plane of politics. While some might consider reverence a passion, Lincoln describes it as crafted from the material of "cold, calculating, unimpassioned reason." In this he seems to disagree with Madison who, as Father of the Constitution, was also very keen on reverence. Although Madison admits that "in a nation of philosophers . . . a reverence for the laws would be sufficiently inculcated by the voice of an enlightened reason," he suspects that ordinary nations will discover reverence to be a salutary public prejudice, dependent on factors other than the abstract rightness of obedience to law. Reverence is more a function of the stability (and hence antiquity) of the government. Madison recommends that this conservative prejudice be carefully encouraged, primarily by not involving the people too often in large and troublesome questions that would disturb their tranquility.

In Lincoln's day, public tranquility (the key ingredient of non-philosophic reverence) was already compromised "by the operation of this mobocratic spirit, which all must admit, is now abroad in the land." Under the circumstance of "increasing disregard for law," Lincoln could not trust to time to settle the inflammation. He had to address the public on the most significant and sensitive issue and he had to do so through reason alone. His speeches are remarkable for the non-impassioned, almost mathematical spareness and rigor of their argumentation. Lord Charnwood, in his biography of Lincoln, says that "[h]e put himself in a position in which if his argument were not sound nothing could save his speech from failure as a speech." This willingness to trust to the compulsion of logic was a great act of faith in the capacities of the people. If self-government is a real possibility, then even a mob must have its "better angels." Perhaps Lincoln's democratic faith helps explain how these same speeches are often suffused with religious

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language and culminate in moments of deep but restrained reverence. Think of the final paragraphs of the Lyceum Address, the Cooper Union Address, and the First Inaugural, as well as virtually the whole of the Gettysburg Address and the Second Inaugural.

Lincoln's speeches are in themselves demonstrations of how "reverence for the constitution and laws" can proceed from reason alone. The efforts he made to reduce his thoughts to the cleanest, most crystalline formulations were in the service of a recovery of orthodox constitutionalism. It was Lincoln's conviction that the Constitution, properly understood and venerated, offered the only hope for a solution to the slavery crisis—a solution that would do justice to all, South as well as North, and achieve justice for all, black as well as white. If slavery could be once again placed where the Founders had placed it—namely "where the public mind could rest in the belief that it was in the course of ultimate extinction"—then all might yet be well. To prove it, Lincoln undertook patient, textual explications of the principles informing the founding charters and equally patient elaborations of the public policy implications of those principles.

In one sense, Lincoln failed miserably. His attempt to engraft these new pillars seemed to shake the edifice itself. The election of the man most dedicated to reason provoked an unreasoning rebellion. The faded scenes of the revolution were replaced with fresh (but unwholesome) scenes of civil war, where hate and revenge turned inward.

Yet the conflict issued in something sublime: the Union was saved and refounded on the fundamental principle of emancipation. And all understood that this was Lincoln's achievement. Walt Whitman described the culmination of the war of secession in the martyrdom of Lincoln as "that seal of the emancipation of three million slaves—that parturition and delivery of our at last really free Republic, born again, henceforth to commence its career of genuine homogeneous Union, compact, consistent with itself." According to Whitman, the death of Lincoln provided

> a cement to the whole people, subtler, more underlying, than any thing in written constitution, or courts or armies—namely, the cement of a death identified thoroughly with that people, at its head, and for its sake. Strange, (is it not?) that battles, martyrs, agonies, blood, even assassination, should so condense—perhaps only really, lastingly condense—a Nationality.

Whitman emphatically sides with history and the commemorative muse of poetry. If Lincoln's analysis in the Lyceum Address is correct, however, then the scenes of the civil war, including its murderous climax—what Whitman calls "its highest poetic, single, central, pictorial denouement"—will fade.

Reason prepares the people to resist usurpation by teaching them how to recognize it. Unlike invasion by an avowed enemy (which in all but the most debilitated nations would prompt self-defense), usurpation can occur imperceptibly, particularly when it is ideological rather than personalistic in character.

So too all subsequent American scenes of moral grandeur. We live right now on the cusp of the loss of the "living history" of World War II—the history that bears "the indubitable testimonies of its own authenticity, in the limbs mangled, in the scars of wounds received." The recent tributes to "the greatest generation," fitting though they are, will not prevent the action of "the all-resistless hurricane" of time.

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There is a direct connection between these perils of "time" and that other danger mentioned by Lincoln: "usurpation." Because the very passions that proved a pillar of liberty at the time of the nation's framing will, in later days, become instruments for demagogic manipulation and demolition, only new pillars "hewn from the solid quarry of sober reason" could succeed in upholding liberty. Reason prepares the people to resist usurpation by teaching them how to recognize it. Unlike invasion by an avowed enemy (which in all but the most debilitated nations would prompt self-defense), usurpation can occur imperceptibly, particularly when it is ideological rather than personal in character. Mistaken understandings insinuate themselves into the public mind and become habitual. To usurp means literally "to take possession of by use," and that is precisely how false philosophy comes to seize public opinion. (Of course, if false philosophy goes far enough, it can blind a nation to external threats as well and weaken self-preservative reflexes.) Resistance to usurpation begins with the ability to recognize what is pernicious, to understand which streams of thought are dangerously at odds with the principles of republican self-government.

Aware that reflection must supersede reflex, Lincoln dedicated his entire political career to educating Americans in the meaning of their original charters. It was an education conducted by means of electoral contests with the usurpers (or their progeny), from John C. Calhoun—the man who began what Lincoln termed "an insidious debauching of the public mind"—to Stephen A. Douglas, whose doctrine of "popular sovereignty" effected a reinterpretation of the Declaration that left it "without the *germ* or even the *suggestion* of the individual rights of man," thereby rendering it "mere rubbish" and "old wadding." Even Lincoln's prosecution of the war entailed teaching—namely, "teaching men that what they cannot take by an election, neither can they take it by a war." Bullets were far from the only weapons employed to defend the sanctity of the ballot. As much as the rebel army, it was the rebel argument about the legitimacy of secession that had to be defeated. Lincoln did so by revealing the articulation of the principle of free elections, the doctrine of the social compact, and the original truth of human equality, at each point contrasting it with the counter-trinity of secession, state rights, and slavery.

The inscription on the Lincoln Memorial reads: "In this temple, as in the hearts of the people, for whom he saved the Union, the memory of Abraham Lincoln is enshrined forever." Despite those words, we must wonder whether there is anything imperishable in Lincoln's statesmanship, never forgetting that in Lincoln's own estimation, memory by itself is insufficient. This is true even in the First Inaugural, where he famously refers to "mystic chords of memory, stretching from every battlefield, and patriot grave, to every living heart and hearthstone, all over this broad land." Lincoln goes on to say, however, that the mystic chords of memory must be activated or sounded by something else within us, namely "the better angels of our nature," which I take to mean intellect and understanding—after all, the whole of the First Inaugural is a carefully argued logical appeal which only waxes poetic in its final lines. Once again, it is reason that stirs reverence; it is dialectics that "will yet swell the chorus of the Union." (The cosmos operates the same way: without mathematics there would be no music of the spheres.) The lesson I would draw is that the memory of Lincoln is vitalized only when we think the thoughts he thought. Accordingly, the Lincoln Memorial rightly includes, on flanking walls, the full texts of the Gettysburg Address and the Second Inaugural—texts that in turn direct the reader to other texts: the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, and the Bible. As the Gettysburg Address tells us, it is fitting to grieve and pay our respects to the dead, but the only complete commemoration is for the living to dedicate themselves to the same "cause" and

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"unfinished task," so that the dead "shall not have died in vain."

Since it is a rare thing to encounter politicians capable of serving as preceptors of the people, the task of citizen education falls heavily upon the schools. To the extent that they have even bothered with it, their approach has been historical—tending to err either in the direction of hagiography or a debunking revisionism that essentially criminalizes the nation's founding. It has not worked. And I don't believe it can work. Students are much more receptive to a philosophic approach—one that puts reason before reverence (or irreverence). Such an approach, in fact, fits well with many of their predispositions and allergies. Being inclined toward cynicism, they are suspicious of pious story-telling. At the same time, despite having been exposed to a lot of "feet-of-clay" historiography, they long to have America's past—and especially the idea of America—restored to respectability (so long as it can be done without a whitewash). While I have focused almost exclusively on Lincoln here, one would proceed very differently in a course, substituting dialectics for exhortation. Students would read works by Calhoun, Douglas, and the abolitionists (especially Frederick Douglass), in addition to Lincoln. Unlike so many other intellectual projects, this one grabs them because it is connected with their sense of self. They want to know how they ought to regard their nation. They want to know how to think about equality and liberty.

Despite the best efforts of the deconstructionists, young people often venerate the Constitution. When they encounter the debate between Jefferson and Madison on the desirability of regular change in the laws, they all immediately side with Jefferson (since "laws and institutions must go hand in hand with the progress of the human mind"), but when they realize that Jefferson wanted a Constitutional Convention every twenty years, these supposed partisans of the new are horrified. It is as Madison had hoped: undisturbed longevity has produced veneration. The problem, however, is that the veneration is often devoid of any knowledge, and so the content of their political ideas is frequently at odds with the documents they claim to respect. Respecting a document is not as straightforward as respecting a person. Without philosophic literacy, it is easy for public opinion to be shanghaied.

Well-intentioned idiocy can be almost as detrimental as malice aforethought.

To give an example: when affirmative action was adopted more than a generation ago, it was widely understood to be a violation of the fundamental principle of color blindness. It was justified as a temporary expedient to reverse the effects of discrimination and exclusion. In other words, it was thought to be a necessary evil—desirable in the circumstances, but not desirable in and of itself. Privilege and preference, once established, however, are not readily relinquished. To make the policy permanent a new rationale was needed: hence the call for "diversity," which makes race-consciousness a positive good. "Diversity" dismisses the old standard of color-blindness, declaring it not only impossible, but also undesirable. This movement from affirmative action to diversity parallels the transformation in antebellum thought which began by recognizing slavery as a necessary evil and ended by hailing it as a positive good (the better to maintain race-based privileges). I don't mean to suggest that the injustice of quotas is on a par with the injustice of slavery, but I do mean to say that the doctrine of the equality of rights-bearing individuals would condemn both. It makes no difference which group—white or black, majority or minority—is arguing for (or being benefited by) the permanence of race-based preferences. If it were understood that the genealogy of the "diversity" argument owes more to Calhoun (who

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pioneered the shift from the constitutional protection of individual rights to group rights) than to the Declaration's assertion of natural human equality, then the generous lip-service paid to the notion might become less fashionable. Well-intentioned idiocy can be almost as detrimental as malice aforethought.

A better understanding of natural rights would improve the quality of public reflection (and the resultant public policy) not just on race, but on a whole range of issues, from foreign policy to genetic engineering and cloning, not to mention our contemporary equivalent of "the crisis of the house divided": abortion. Although such an education can be readily accomplished through the study of the Founders and Lincoln, there are all sorts of other ways to do it as well, since it is not fundamentally an historical enterprise, but a philosophic one. However it's done, it must challenge the usurping ideas that have slipped in over time—which turn out to be closely related (though not identical) to those Lincoln confronted. I am not suggesting a civic catechism (which is likely to be about as efficacious as the religious version).

What Americans need is a searching exploration of the meaning of the founding charters, and that would include an examination of the most powerful dissenting views. Moreover, as Lincoln understood, the recovery of old insights would not mean a return to square one, but an ascent—a "new birth of freedom." The aim is not to get back to the past, but "back to the future." Fundamentalism and progress are conjoined. Orthodoxy can be the most creative stance. No one, particularly not democratic man, wants to feel like an epigone. The example of Lincoln shows us how our pride can be satisfied, not through departures and deconstruction, but through fidelity and humility. It is by means of a refreshed and deepened understanding of self-government—by means of the building of new pillars—that we might make the bold claim of having secured for ourselves "the blessings of liberty."

The Survival of Culture:

Permanent Values in a Virtual Age

A Symposium

Participants:

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The death of socialism?

by Roger Kimball

Those who dare to undertake the institution of a people must feel themselves capable, as it were, of changing human nature, of transforming each individual . . . into a part of a much greater whole, . . . of altering the constitution of man for the purpose of strengthening it.
—Jean-Jacques Rousseau, 1762

We are all socialists nowadays.
—Edward, Prince of Wales, 1895

The most important political event of the twentieth century is not the crisis of capitalism but the death of socialism.
—Irving Kristol, 1976

What is socialism? In part, it is optimism translated into a political program. Until he took up gardening, Candide was a sort of proto-socialist; his mentor Pangloss could have been one of socialism's founding philosophers. Socialism is also unselfishness embraced as an axiom: the gratifying *emotion* of unselfishness, experienced alternately as resentment against others and titillating satisfaction with oneself. The philosophy of Rousseau, which elevated what he called the "indescribably sweet" feeling of virtue into a political imperative, is socialism *in ovo*. "Man is born free," Rousseau famously exclaimed, "but is everywhere in chains." That heart-stopping conundrum—too thrilling to be corrected by mere experience—is the fundamental motor of socialism. It is a motor fueled by this corollary: that the multitude unaccountably colludes in perpetuating its own bondage and must therefore be, in Rousseau's ominous phrase, "forced to be free."

We owe the term "socialism" to some followers of Robert Owen, the nineteenth-century British industrialist who founded New Harmony, a short-lived utopian community on the banks of the Wabash in Indiana. Owen's initial reception in America was impressive. In an 1825 address to Congress, Joshua Muravchik reports in *Heaven on Earth: The Rise and Fall of Socialism*,[1] Owen's audience included not only congressmen but also Supreme Court justices, cabinet members, President Monroe, and President-elect John Quincy Adams. Owen described to this august assemblage how his efforts to replace the "individual selfish system" with a "united social" system would bring forth a "new man" who was free from the grasping imperatives that had marred human nature from time immemorial. (And not only *human* nature: the utopian socialist Charles Fourier expected selfishness and cruelty to be obliterated from the animal kingdom as well: one day, he thought, even lions and whales would be domesticated.)

The starry-eyed aspect of socialist thinking did not preclude a large element of steel. As Muravchik points out, the French Revo-

1 *Heaven on Earth: The Rise and Fall of Socialism*, by Joshua Muravchik; Encounter Books, 400 pages, $27.95.

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lution was "the manger" of socialism. It was then that the philosophy of Rousseau emerged from the pages of tracts and manifestos to strut across the bloody field of history. The architects of the revolution invoked Rousseau early and often as they set about the task of "changing human nature," of "altering the constitution of man for the purpose of strengthening it."

This metamorphosis does not come easily. Human nature is a recalcitrant thing. It is embodied as much in persistent human institutions like the family and the church as in the human heart. All must be remade from the ground up if "Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity" are at last to be realized. Since history is little more than an accumulation of errors, history as hitherto known must be abolished. The past, a vast repository of injustice, is by definition the enemy. Accordingly, the revolutionists tossed out the Gregorian calendar and started again at Year One. They replaced the Genesis-inspired seven-day week with a ten-day cycle and rebaptized the months with names reflecting their new cult of nature: Brumaire (fog), Thermidor (heat), Vendémiare (wind), etc. A new religion was born, as imperious as it was jealous. It is significant that the socialist mentality is usually also an atheistic mentality, where atheism is understood not so much as the disbelief in God as the hatred of God—an attitude as precarious logically as it has been destructive in practice. There is an important sense in which religion as traditionally understood reconciles humanity to imperfection and to failure. Since the socialist sets out to abolish failure, traditional religion is worse than *de trop*: it is an impediment to perfection. ("Criticism of religion," Marx said, "is the prelude to all criticism.") In 1793, the churches were closed to worship and ransacked for booty. The anti-clericalism that had been a prominent feature of revolutionary sentiment grew increasingly vicious. Muravchik describes so-called "revolutionary marriages" in which priests and nuns were tied together naked and drowned. Rousseau was always going on about establishing the "reign of virtue." His far-seeing disciple Maximilien Robespierre spoke more frankly of "virtue and its emanation, terror."

It is one of the great ironies of modern history that socialism, which promises a more humane, caring, and equitable society, has consistently delivered a more oppressive and mismanaged one. Socialism's motto—Muravchik optimistically offers it to us as socialism's "epitaph"—turns out to be: "If you build it, they will leave."

If, one must add, they are allowed to leave. As Muravchik reminds us in this excellent survey of socialist personalities and socialist experiments, encouraging dissent is never high on a socialist's agenda. The socialist pretends to have glimpsed paradise on earth. Those who decline the invitation to embrace the vision are not just ungrateful: they are traitors to the cause of human perfection. Dissent is therefore not mere disagreement but treachery. Treachery is properly met not with arguments but (as circumstances permit) the guillotine, the concentration camp, the purge.

In tracing "socialism's phenomenal trajectory," *Heaven on Earth* tells the "story of man's most ambitious attempt to supplant religion with a doctrine about how life ought to be lived that claimed grounding in science rather than revelation." It is, to say the least, a cautionary tale. Muravchik provides a devastating anatomy of the socialist dream—a dream that with clocklike regularity becomes a nightmare. If, as Muravchik suggests, "socialism was . . . the most popular political idea ever invented," it is also undoubtedly the bloodiest. Of course, many who profess socialism are decent and humane people. And it is worth noting that socialism comes in mild as well as tyrannical versions. Muravchik, who was once a socialist himself, pays frequent homage to the generous impulses that lie behind some allotropes of the socialist enterprise. Nevertheless, he acknowledges that "regimes calling themselves socialist have murdered more than one hundred million people since

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1917." Why? Why is it that "the more dogged the effort to achieve" the announced goals of socialism, "the more the outcome mocked the human ideals it proclaimed"? And why is it that conservatives, who by and large have agreed with Samuel Johnson that "A decent provision for the poor is the true test of civilization," have regularly been demonized as uncaring brutes?

A large part of the answer lies in the intellectual dynamics of utopianism. "Utopia" is Greek for "nowhere": a made-up word for a make-believe place. The search for nowhere inevitably deprecates any and every "somewhere." Socialism, which is based on incorrigible optimism about human nature, is a species of utopianism. It experiences the friction of reality as an intolerable brake on its expectations. "Utopians," the philosopher Leszek Kolakowski observed in "The Death of Utopia Reconsidered," "once they attempt to convert their visions into practical proposals, come up with the most malignant project ever devised: they want to institutionalize fraternity, which is the surest way to totalitarian despotism."

There was also the intervention of Marx. Intellectually, Marxism is the most highly developed—as well as the most influential and most murderous—form of socialism the world has seen. But Kolakowski is surely correct that Marxism's influence, far from depending on its alleged "scientific character," depends "almost entirely [on] . . . its prophetic, fantastic, and irrational elements." Marxism says that as capitalist societies develop, most people are hounded into abject poverty while a tiny coterie of capitalists thrive. This scenario is presented, à la Hegel, as a "dialectical" inevitability. But in fact capitalism has always made societies richer, much richer. Capitalists get rich, and workers become more prosperous than their grandparents could have ever imagined possible.

Whether or not this is a "necessary" concomitant of market forces, it is an historical fact. The curious thing is that this phenomenon, which any dispassionate observer might count as a refutation, leaves the true-believing Marxist entirely unruffled. Whatever else one can say about it, Marxism is surely one of the most impervious systems of thought ever devised. It is also one of the most protean. It has always, as Kolakowski notes, been able to change "content from one situation to another and [crossbreed] with other ideological traditions." In part, this is a testimony to its intellectual adaptability; in part, it is simple mendacity. As Marx himself explained in an 1857 letter to Friedrich Engels about an election prediction he had made, "It's possible that I shall make an ass of myself. But in that case one can always get out of it with a little dialectic. I have, of course, so worded my proposition as to be right either way."

Muravchik begins his account of the career of socialism with figures like François-Noël Babeuf and Sylvain Maréchal, whose radical egalitarianism and endorsement of violence helped set the tone—and the murderous program—of the French Revolution. Maréchal, who took to signing himself l'HSD (l'Homme Sans Dieu, the man without God), was above all an apostle of radical egalitarianism: equality understood not as a legal postulate but as an existential imperative. "If there is a single man on earth who is richer and more powerful than his fellows," he wrote, "then the equilibrium is broken: crime and misfortune are on earth." It is imperative, Maréchal said in his *Manifesto of Equals*, to "remove from every individual the hope of ever becoming richer, or more powerful, or more distinguished by his intelligence." Tough work, that removal, but the promised rewards were great: really establish equality, Maréchal argued, and the result would be "the disappearance of boundary marks, hedges, walls, door-locks, disputes, trials, thefts, murders, all crimes . . . courts, prisons, gallows, penalties, . . . envy, jealousy, insatiability, pride, deception, duplicity, in short all vices." Of course, until that happy day arrives there will be plenty of "trials, thefts, murders, . . . courts, prisons, gallows, penalties" in order to hasten the institution of equality.

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Babeuf, who called himself "Gracchus" Babeuf after the legendary Roman land reformer, also put radical equality at the center of his revolutionary program. Since nothing institutionalized inequality more than private property, he reasoned, private property and its distillate, money, must go. Babeuf looked forward to the "general overthrow of the system of private property" as an "inevitable" adjunct of revolution. "Society," he said, "must be made to operate in such a way that it eradicates once and for all the desire of a man to become richer, or wiser, or more powerful than others." Like Maréchal—like Robespierre whom he admired as a "regenerator" who "mow[ed] down all that impeded him"—Babeuf (who also called himself "the Marat of the Somme") believed that "in order to govern judiciously it is necessary to terrorize the evilly disposed, the royalists, papists and starvers of the public. . . . [O]ne cannot govern democratically without this terrorism." If the cost of paradise was unfortunately high, it was as nothing compared with the envisioned benefits. "I don't think it is impossible," Babeuf enthused to his wife, "that within a year, if we carry out our measures aright and act with all necessary prudence, we shall succeed in ensuring general happiness on earth."

Today Babeuf is little more than a footnote to the history of tyranny. As with many extremists, the very extravagance of his pronouncements is implicitly taken as a license to dismiss him or deprecate his importance. What fundamentally challenges the status quo is defanged by the rhetoric of extremism: what is extreme is also exceptional, a special case, i.e., not really threatening. But this line of reasoning misunderstands the threat posed by radicals like Babeuf. His extremism was not limited to acts perpetrated in the late eighteenth century. It lived on in the murderous socialist programs he helped to inspire. Babeuf's importance in the history of socialism was underscored by Marx and Engels. In *The Holy Family*, their first work together, they fondly note that Babeuf's attack on private property "gave rise to the communist idea." (The essence of Communism, Marx correctly observed, can be summed up in a single phrase: the abolition of private property.) Babeuf's importance was reaffirmed in the founding manifesto of the Comintern in 1919, whose authors saw themselves as "the direct continuators of the heroic endeavors and martyrdom of a long line of revolutionary generations [starting] from Babeuf." In our own day, the Frankfurt-school Marxist Herbert Marcuse has championed Babeuf's thought as a tool to battle the seductive evils of advanced capitalism.

Muravchik ranges confidently through the history of socialism, neatly weaving biography, anecdote, and political commentary into a fascinating chronicle of disappointed idealism. A large part of *Heaven on Earth* is given over to the rise and eventual foundering of what we might call "soft socialism." Muravchik patiently details the experiments of utopians like Robert Owen, Marxist reformers like Eduard Bernstein (a protégé of Engels), the trade-union movements of Samuel Gompers and George Meany, and mid-twentieth-century redactions of the socialist impulse in Clement Attlee's Labour government, Julius Nyerere's Tanzania, and the Israeli kibbutz.

Perhaps his most illuminating pages are devoted to the careers of Mussolini and of Engels. We tend to think of fascism as the antithesis of socialism or Marxism. But as Muravchik reminds us, there are in fact deep continuities between them. Mussolini began as a disciple of Lenin and did not so much repudiate Marxism-Leninism as become a self-declared "heretic." Thus one of Mussolini's groups of thugs called itself the Cheka, after Lenin's secret police. As Muravchik observes, "However fierce they grew in their antipathy to communism, the fascists never ceased mimicking it, implicitly underscoring their claim to be the true or superior heirs to the same legacy." (Something similar can be said of Hitler, whose party, after all, was called National Socialism. It is true that Hitler was adamantly

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anti-Communist; at the same time, he acknowledged that he had "learned a great deal from Marxism.")

Most of us think of Engels as the junior partner in the conglomerate of Marxism, Inc. In some ways that perception is accurate. But Muravchik shows that Engels's contribution to the formation of Marxist doctrine was much larger than is usually recognized. The well-to-do son of a German textile manufacturer, Engels beavered diligently for decades in the Manchester office of Engels & Ermen in order to earn enough money to support his comrade-in-arms. (Engels was always sending Marx money; when he finally retired from the family firm, he made Marx an annuity of £350—several times more than the average family lived on but not enough for Marx, who always adjusted his spending to a level above what his benefactors supplied.) Engels was an indefatigable publicist. It was Engels, for example, who suggested the title "Communist Manifesto" for their jointly authored "confession of faith." When Marx finally, after innumerable delays, managed to complete the first volume of that great reader-proof tome *Das Kapital*, Engels flogged it everywhere, taking it upon himself to write ten separate reviews of the book. He also completed volumes two and three of the book, working up Marx's scattered notes into something resembling a consecutive argument. More substantively, Engels's 1844 "Outlines of a Critique of Political Economy" articulated many central points of the doctrine we have since learned to call Marxism, above all the thesis that the evolution of capitalism necessarily leads to cutthroat competition among capitalists and poverty and dehumanization for the majority of the populace. Marx himself called it "a work of genius" and incorporated many of its central arguments into his later work.

Muravchik's argument has two aspects. Like many other disabused commentators, he presents a sobering chronicle of socialism's delusions and crimes. He reminds us—if we still need reminding—of the central role that the "annihilation . . . of reactionary races" (Marx), the "extermination" of enemies (Lenin) has always played in "really existing" Marxism. Muravchik also presents the cheering news that daybreak has come at last, that we have finally awakened from the long dream of socialist utopia. It is difficult to argue with the first part of his argument. What about the second? It is certainly significant that the Soviet Union imploded and that its last leader, Mikhail Gorbachev, should have recently acknowledged that Communist claims about economic progress had been "pure propaganda." Perhaps it is also significant that Tony Blair in Britain should have campaigned on the slogan "Labour is the party of business." But I cannot help receiving the news of socialism's death with a certain scepticism. For one thing, the fact that an idea has been thoroughly discredited does nothing to render it impotent. It is part of the perversity of human nature that discredited ideas are often the most successful ideas. Then, too, I see little evidence that socialism's fundamental tenet—namely, the ideal of equality—is on its way to the dustbin of history. The wheels of egalitarianism may grind away more slowly in liberal democratic countries than in Communist ones, but grind away they do. It would be pleasant to think that in leaving history's bloodiest century behind, we have also left behind the passions that sparked its unprecedented carnage. But time and again history has taught us that the hunger for equality is among mankind's most brutal passions. It is for this reason that I believe the philosopher David Stove was correct when he identified "bloodthirstiness" as a central ingredient in the psychology of egalitarianism. Socialism will be conquered to the extent that egalitarianism is conquered. In the meanwhile, I fear that Stove is correct that "very far from communism being dead, as some foolish people at present believe, we can confidently look forward to bigger and better Marxes, Lenins, Stalins, Maos, Kim Il Sungs, Pol Pots, Ceausescus, Baader-Meinhofs, Shining Paths, and all the rest."

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G. A. Henty & the vision of empire

by Brooke Allen

Some children's books seem to be timeless: *Peter Rabbit*, for instance, or *Charlotte's Web*. Others are unmistakably a product of their *Zeitgeist* and become less accessible with each passing generation: it will be surprising if today's bestselling author Judy Blume appeals to children in the year 2050 or so. In the case of G. A. Henty (1832–1902), even the titles, with their potent whiff of Victorian imperial verve and muscular Christianity, are enough to elicit a condescending smile from modern readers: *By Sheer Pluck: A Tale of the Ashanti War*; or *With Buller in Natal*; or *A Dash for Khartoum: A Tale of the Nile Expedition*; or *The Tiger of Mysore: A Story of the War With Tippoo Sahib*.

Henry's eighty historical adventure novels for boys (yes, for boys—it goes without saying that no writer today would get away with this sort of gender stereotyping) were wildly popular in their day and continued to find a healthy readership right up to the Second World War. Thereafter, the breakup of the British Empire and the degradation of its once proud ethos put them almost instantly out of date. And nowadays, with cultural relativism and political correctness dominating children's publishing, the kind of broad cultural assumptions Henty held are downright taboo. How many school teachers, for instance, would dare recommend a book with the title *A Tale of the Western Plains: or, Redskin and Cowboy*? And how seriously will anyone take dialogue like the following (from *A Knight of the White Cross*):

> "Well, young sir, how like you the prospect of your pageship?"
>
> "I like it greatly, sir, but shall like still more the time when I can buckle on armor and take a share of fighting with the infidels."

Today all children's literature is furiously vetted by publishers, educators, and librarians fearful of causing offense to some ethnic or social group. I recently read my children a book that had given me great pleasure as a child: Lois Lenski's *Indian Captive*, the true story of a young girl, an eighteenth-century colonist, who was captured by Seneca Indians and eventually became a full-fledged member of the tribe. *Indian Captive* is extraordinarily sensitive to the Seneca way of life as it describes Mary Jemison's slow and sometimes painful acculturation; in the end, when she is given the choice of staying with the Senecas or returning to the white world, she realizes that the Senecas have become her true family. Yet when I mentioned this book to a librarian at a prominent New York school, I was told in no uncertain terms that it was "racist."

How much more racist, classist, sexist, and every other type of -ist then is Henty, whose young heroes have internalized an ideal of their own *mission civiliatrice* and would certainly concur with the author's younger contemporary Winston Churchill

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when he rhetorically inquired, upon joining Kitchener's mission to the Sudan in 1898, "What enterprise that an enlightened community may attempt is more noble and profitable than the reclamation from barbarism of fertile regions and large populations? To give peace to warring tribes where all was violence, to strike the chains off the slave, to draw the richness from the soil . . . what more beautiful ideal or more valuable reward can inspire human effort?"

Quaintly written on the one hand, culturally passé on the other, Henty's books were all but forgotten during the second half of the twentieth century, despite the fact that he had inspired not only generations of future soldiers and administrators but also an array of future intellectuals from Henry Miller to Roy Jenkins, for his research and attention to detail was stunning, his historical and local flavor flawless, his battle accounts impeccably accurate. Henty's descriptions of eighteenth-century Madras in *With Clive in India*, for instance, and of Hannibal's heterogeneous, exotic army in *The Young Carthaginian*, are really masterly. A.J.P. Taylor recalls of Henty books that "the best feature was the battle diagrams with the oblongs for the opposing forces of cavalry and infantry. I reproduced them on the attic floor with my toy soldiers. . . . As a matter of fact . . . vague recollections from Henty carried me through when I had to lecture on the Thirty Years' War at Manchester University." And Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., has named Henty as a powerful early influence: "Such knowledge as I have of ancient Egypt, the republic of Venice, India, southern Africa, the rise of the Dutch republic, the struggle for Chilean independence, the Franco-Prussian War, the Boxer Rebellion, and many other historical episodes, had its roots in Henty," he wrote. "He . . . provoked thought about history. A sturdy Tory, Henty wrote about the American Revolution from the viewpoint of the Loyalists (*True to the Old Flag*) and the Civil War from the viewpoint of the Confederates (*With Lee in Virginia*). One received a new slant on what had seemed historical verities, nor was one corrupted thereby"—a very important point, but anathema in today's climate.

To call Henty a sturdy Tory is misleading. He was in fact comparatively liberal, even politically correct according to the standards of his day. Nowhere in his books can one find, for example, the crude anti-Catholicism of Charles Kingsley's *Westward Ho!*, or the crude anti-Semitism of Buchan or Belloc, or the crude racism of any number of his contemporaries. Like many Britons who saw action in the wars of Empire, he had nothing but respect for the great fighting nations like the Zulus, the Ashantis, the Pathans, and the Gurkhas. He may have dealt with the American Civil War from the Confederate point of view, but he also wrote about the Battle of the Boyne from the Irish one, and bitterly castigated "the atrocious conduct of William [III]'s army of foreign mercenaries towards the people of Ireland." A feature of every Henty book is that both sides of a given issue, however apparently questionable one of them might be, are always given due respect. Here, for example, from *Under Drake's Flag*, the author steps into the action *in propria persona* to discuss a knotty moral point:

> English boys are accustomed to think with feelings of unmitigated horror and indignation of the days of the Inquisition, and in times like these, when a general toleration of religious opinion prevails, it appears to us almost incredible that men should put others to death in the name of religion. But it is only by placing ourselves in the position of the persecutors of the middle ages that we can see that what appears to us cruelty and barbarity of the worst kind was really the result of a zeal in its way as earnest, if not as praiseworthy, as that which now impels missionaries to go with their lives in their hands to regions where little but a martyr's grave can be expected. Nowadays we believe—at least all right-minded men believe—that there is good in all creeds, and that it would be rash indeed to condemn men who act up to the best of their

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> lights, even though those lights may not be our own.

Few people, then or now, have had a good word to say for the Spanish Inquisitors, but Henty found a way to help us understand their system of thought. Other aspects of this excerpt, too, will strike a modern reader. Do we believe, *nowadays*—as opposed to Henty's "nowadays"—that there is really good in all creeds? It would be nice to think that we do, but there's not much evidence for it, despite the sugar-coating of tolerance the schools make such an effort to deliver.

The truth is that, far from administering a simpleminded dose of imperialist rhetoric, Henty's books do indeed prompt young readers to draw their own conclusions rather than simply parrot received opinion. In *A Knight of the White Cross*, the teenaged hero, Gervase Tresham, learns in the course of his years as Knight of the Order of St. John that his Muslim enemies can be every bit as brave and noble as his Christian colleagues, and that the Turkish system, though (of course!) inferior to the Christian one, has strengths that the Christians might do well to imitate: the Turks, for example, let those of high ability rise to the top of their command, whatever the accident of their birth. The hero of *With Lee in Virginia*, Vincent Wingfield, although a slaveholder, is a humanitarian and comes close to being an abolitionist, and while the various slave characters in the novel are at first presented as child-like, as the book progresses they evolve into more responsible human beings and end up playing a very active role in the story. The treatment of the issue in fact is complex and demands a certain amount of thought and the kind of imaginative leap most schoolchildren are seldom required to make.

Henty, to be sure, was as bound and defined by the assumptions of his time as we are by ours. Whether an ancient Briton, a Carthaginian officer, a medieval knight, or a sixteenth-century Huguenot, none of Henty's heroes is ever anything but a Victorian gentleman. As one avid Henty collector has described the books, "They're always about boys sixteen to seventeen years old who see history taking place, who get involved in some military action, and there's always a lot of high morals talked about. The hero always married the squire's daughter and was in the landed gentry by the time he was twenty-three."

Sometimes Dr. Arnold's creed is ludicrously out of place in the historical context into whose service it has been pressed. In *Under Drake's Flag* two young Elizabethan buccaneers face their apparently imminent death with a rather un-Elizabethan diction and philosophy:

> "Well, Ned, we have had more good fortune than we could have expected. We might have been killed on the day when we landed, and we have spent six jolly months in wandering together as hunters on the plain. If we must die, let us behave like Englishmen and Christians. It may be that our lives have not been as good as they should have been; but so far as we know, we have both done our duty, and it may be that, as we die for the faults of others, it may come to be considered as a balance against our own faults."
>
> "We must hope so, Tom. I think we have both done, I won't say our best, but as well as could be expected in so rough a life. We have followed the exhortations of the good chaplain and have never joined in the riotous ways of the sailors in general. We must trust that the good God will forgive us our sins, and strengthen us to go through this last trial."

Campy, yes, easy to laugh at—straight Blackadder, in fact. Henty's total lack of irony makes him absurd to modern eyes, but also refreshing; recent equivalents of this sort of action adventure, like *Indiana Jones*, tend to be smirkingly ironic as though in perpetual apology for their unsophisticated subject matter.

But Henty's books, though hokey, are not unsophisticated, or at least not in a couple of

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very important ways. First of all, their syntax and vocabulary demand much more of the reader than contemporary books for the same age group, that is, ages ten to fifteen. "These tactics were admirably adapted to the nature of the contest; the only thing which threatened to render them nugatory was the presence of the fierce dogs of the Spaniards." Would any modern author for the pre-teen market challenge his readers with such a sentence? As for subject matter, Henty assumes a breadth of historical knowledge that practically no teenager, English or American, commands today: for example, in the introduction to his *In the Reign of Terror: The Adventures of a Westminster Boy*, he writes, "My object has been rather to tell you a tale of interest than to impart historical knowledge, for the facts of the dreadful time when 'the terror' reigned supreme in France are well known to all educated lads." Today, very few educated lads would be able to muster many facts about the Terror, perhaps not even its date, and as for the Ashanti campaign or the Carlist Wars—!

The failure of multiculturalism to provide American students with a truly multicultural education or worldview has been dismal, as we found out in the panicked scramble for information and enlightenment after the September 11 attacks. If we had all been reading Henty's *To Herat and Kabul* instead of *The Babysitter's Club* as children, we might have been better prepared! And how many of the people struggling to understand what they perceive as the unprecedented crimes of Osama bin Laden remember or have even heard of the Mahdi? They could do worse than to have a look at Henty's excellent *With Kitchener in the Soudan*, or John Buchan's *Greenmantle*.

The New York Times has reported that the study of foreign languages has declined significantly in the last forty years and that at last count, in 1998, only 8 percent of college students were enrolled in a foreign language course. In a recent article for the *Times* magazine section, Margaret Talbot wondered just what exactly the multicultural approach has achieved: "What it apparently did not do was promote the study of other languages, or indeed of other cultures. . . . It was the upbeat ethnic-festival approach, which is nice, but which also allows you to leave out a lot of groups, like those that speak difficult languages or live in rough neighborhoods of the world or don't seem to treat women particularly well."

Now, suddenly, Henty is a wallflower no more. Three publishing houses, PrestonSpeed Publications, Lost Classics Book Company, and Memoria Press, have begun reissuing Henty titles for the home-school market, and home-schooling parents are buying them in quantity. They like them for several reasons: most of all for their educational value, but also for their unswerving moralism—as PrestonSpeed's press material tells us, Henty's heroes are "diligent, courageous, intelligent, and dedicated to their country and cause"—and for what the largely evangelical Christian home-schooling population sees as a congenially Christian point of view. It is true that Henty's heroes are professed Christians, or if not actually Christian, as in the case of Hannibal's junior officer, Josephus's lieutenant, or Beric the Romanized Briton, at least some species of proto-Christian: but it should be pointed out that modern American evangelical Christianity and the Victorian muscular variety are two rather different things. High religious enthusiasm was not the norm among British Imperial army officers; General Gordon's evangelistic fervor, for example, was considered exceptional. Jan Morris has provided an amusing characterization of the religious attitude of the British officer class (to which Henty's heroes always belong at least in spirit): "Most officers considered themselves good Christians, but they did not think too deeply or too often about their religion, and when they did, their thoughts were not likely to be profound. Wolseley once wondered what heaven was like and thought 'surely there must be a United Services Club there where old Army and Navy men may meet to talk over wars by land and sea.'"

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On the whole the home-schoolers' revival of Henty is a very fine thing, but they miss the mark when they try to kill two birds with one stone by making Henty serve both as history and literature. History yes; literature no. Henty books, while entertaining, are formulaic, stilted, and carelessly written—about on the level of *The Hardy Boys*, only with vastly more interesting subject matter. The fact that Henty wrote 144 books in his career should indicate their quality: they are unedited, repetitive, and sloppy; he must have dictated at a tremendous pace and done very little proofreading before the books went to press. He was a writing machine, and the finished products reflect that fact.

Yet one can understand the home-schoolers' dilemma. They reject the always controversial *Catcher in the Rye* and its ilk, as well as the new books that boost sensitivity toward gays, native Americans, and other minority groups—a genre that cannot qualify as "literature" any more than Henty can. As Adrian Wooldridge has written in *The Economist*, "The fact that so many people feel that they have to choose between politically correct yuckiness and Victorian imperialism surely suggests that there is a lucrative gap in the children's book market." Yes, except that there are plenty of alternatives that should already fit the bill for those who like and approve of Henty yet want real literary content. Walter Scott and James Fenimore Cooper have become hopelessly dull and dated, but what about Robert Louis Stevenson? If *Doctor Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* is too rich for the home-schoolers' blood, there are always *Kidnapped, Catriona,* and *The Master of Ballantrae*. And what about *Lorna Doone*, *Kim*, *Great Expectations*, *A Tale of Two Cities*, *Northanger Abbey*, *The Time Machine*, *The Invisible Man*, *The Turn of the Screw*? Even old chestnuts like *The Scarlet Pimpernel*, *Beau Geste*, and *Lives of a Bengal Lancer* are infinitely better books than anything Henty wrote.

Henty, like his heroes, was an eyewitness to some of the most exciting events of his time. As a journalist, he was in Paris under the Communes, with Wolseley in the Ashanti Country, and with Napier in Ethiopia; he saw the Carlist wars in Spain, spent time with Garibaldi's army in Italy and with the Turks in Serbia, visited the California gold fields, was present at the opening of the Suez Canal, and toured India with the then-Prince of Wales (later Edward VII). His books reflect the excitement of a heady historical moment. "What theatre!" Jan Morris has remarked of the era. "The tragedy of Isandhlwana, the thrilling defence of Rorke's Drift! Gordon martyred at Khartoum! 'Dr. Livingstone I presume'! The redcoats helter-skelter from the summit of Majuba, Sir Garnet Wolseley burning the charnel-houses of Kumasi!"

It was only a century ago, yet its essence is already as defunct as that of Periclean Athens. During the decade after Henty's death, younger writers like Forster and Conrad created the new vision of Empire, and it is a vision that persists today. Rightly or wrongly, the imperial ideal has been hopelessly degraded. The last war of the British Empire, the Falklands War, was a pathetic affair likened by one observer to two bald men fighting over a comb; what excitement it generated was both febrile and transient. What would a modern equivalent of Henty write about? What emotions would he attempt to awaken? What titles might he come up with? *In the Caves of Kabul*? *To Kuwait With Stormin' Norman*?

The home-schoolers' effort to revive Henty is both admirable and touching; let's hope it is not entirely quixotic.

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"Deviously implicit faith": Maurice Cowling on religion

by Timothy Fuller

With Volume III of *Religion and Public Doctrine in Modern England: Accommodations*,[1] the English historian Maurice Cowling brings to an end his monumental project to understand the gradual dissolution of Christian authority in England over the last 150 years. Cowling, for many years a don at Peterhouse, Cambridge, devoted twenty-five years to this project. Volume I, substantially completed in the late 1970s, appeared in 1980; Volume II: *Assaults*, appeared in 1985. Although he has written several other books on political and cultural topics—and although he and his circle at Peterhouse helped to define a generation of English conservative thought—*Religion and Public Doctrine* is clearly his magnum opus. It is also a belated declaration of his calling and his penitential act for failing to devote his whole life unequivocally to his task. "Religion and Public Doctrine," he writes toward the end of Volume III, "is written in sadness rather than condemnation, in the shadow of a carelessness about a manifest vocation and with a wish to repay some part of the debt which carelessness has incurred."

Cowling set himself a twofold task in this long work. First, he attempts to describe the destruction of the confessional state and the old regime, analyzing along the way the decline of the Anglican and aristocratic establishment from the early nineteenth century. Second, he assesses the many attempts to respond to this political-religious crisis: the various reformulations that aimed to salvage what was salvageable in the religious tradition, and the assaults that aimed to eradicate it fully and finally. Cowling's task has been, in a way reminiscent of the effort of the Tractarians in the 1830s, to make it impossible for those who still care for Christianity to evade by circumlocution or wishful thinking the modern intellectual assault on Christianity. He exposes the evasive and self-deceiving character of many of the efforts to redefine or repackage Christian doctrine in progressive, secular idioms even as he dramatizes the appalling character of much in the post-Christian milieu. He shows that latitudinarianism, for example, "though designed to reanimate Protestantism and enable it to handle modern thought, came near to extinguishing Protestantism and leaving it indistinguishable from modern thought. Protestant appearances were kept up. But some of the enlargements were grotesque."

Religion and Public Doctrine does not deal with the commitments of ordinary citizens, "the silent majority," but with "the intelligentsia whose literature the silent majority does not read." It "tells a simple story" and has, Cowling writes, "a simple message": "that, though the ways in which Christianity may be justified once it has been arrived at may vary according to the cir-

1 *Religion and Public Doctrine in Modern England, Volume III: Accommodations*, by Maurice Cowling; Cambridge University Press, 766 pages, £65.

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cumstances, what cannot be varied is the prior engagement, without which no analysis, no judgment of past and present, no apologetic, no rationality, and no literature can be Christian." The fate of that "prior engagement" in modern society is one of the book's primary subplots.

Cowling admits that we cannot rule out the possibility that Christian civilization is coming to an end. What he challenges is the assumption—widespread among the intelligentsia—that the eclipse of Christianity is inevitable, that science or some other achievement of modern secular society has "either become a religion or made religion unnecessary." Many historical "inevitabilities," Cowling points out, have failed to materialize. (Consider the claims for socialism.) Moreover, he argues that "the post-Christian consensus" that characterizes modern society remains so deeply shaped by religious concerns that "even thinkers who disclaim" religion are in effect "filling the space filled previously by historic religion," with the result that "mere disclaimer" does not "effect a disengagement." There is a dialectic among traditional Christians, anti-Christians, revisionist and latitudinarian Christians, and post-Christians. They cannot escape each other even when they claim to do so. Cowling makes no predictions. But his work does imply (most of his Christian professions remain implicit) a distinction between Christian hope—which is trans-historical and knows by faith that the religious sense cannot disappear—and worldly optimism—which seeks to make manageable the supposed irreversibility of secularization.

Cowling agrees with Cardinal Newman that philosophy will never be able to do for us what religion does, and he insists that much of what presents itself as superseding religion is really a disguised form of religiosity. Describing himself as a "cynical Conservative who has never had the slightest enthusiasm for the rhetoric of progress, virtue and improvement," he is withering about "the claim to self-ratifying superiority which has been so central a feature of both post-Christian and anti-Christian thought in modern England." He notes, for example, that "English thought in the last century and a half has been distinguished less by argument than by assertion, sarcasm and irony, by emancipation from emancipation and by exposure of the uncertainties which surround relations between theory and practice." Arguing against the supposition that secularization is a synonym for progress, Cowling aims "to bring progress out of its ghetto" on the grounds that "change may be regressive, that revivals and reactions, while ostensibly rooted in the past, in fact transform the past."

In other words, Cowling deconstructs the demythologizers. He began in Volume I with an autobiographical self-deconstruction, anticipating at the outset objections that would convict him of a false claim of neutrality, and he reiterates that caveat in Volume III: "This work is both personal and impersonal. It could not have been written without the evidences of England's religious dilapidation which the author found in himself at an early stage and has never really lost sight of. But equally it could not have been written if these evidences had not been transmuted (by embarrassment as much as by historical duty) into literary, historical impersonality."

Cowling rejects neutral, disengaged historiography. For him, all historical accounts of important matters are polemical. Argument is unavoidable. More truth is to be discerned, he thinks, by argument and mutual judgment among the parties than by aspiring to absolute disinterestedness. His historiography "recognizes that the search for the past of the nation to which the historian belongs is likely to mirror the historian's past rather than the nation's and that mirroring is not only unavoidable but also desirable in so far as it is part of the process by which historians contribute towards conceptualizing the future." Cowling is neither the detached historian, seeking to study the past "for its own sake," nor

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the politically engaged historian bent on making policy recommendations.

But, of course, he is political:

> The assumptions of this work are that venom and polemic can disclose the historical process as readily as modesty and analysis can . . . and that contraction in the scope of historical statement will in any case be powerless against historians who will not be persuaded by professional modesty. . . . Historical thinking is not the only form of thinking which needs to be rescued from ideological correctness. But because historical writing is central to modern culture, it is true especially of historical thinking that the best way to level the field between correctness and its enemies is through a conservative deconstruction which understands that all historical writing is subjective, that it is all an invention of a past out of material which is present, and that the past owes its vitality to the historian's present interests and sympathies.

Traditionalists will want to think carefully about the nature of this defense of tradition.

Cowling is not constrained by standard chronology. He subverts the familiar, linear, developmental scheme of historical succession. To accept it, he argues, is to play into the hands of secular progressives. Volume I presented an account of the intellectual environment in which Cowling was "victimized" in forming his outlook in the mid-twentieth century, and against which he necessarily had to struggle, eventually to flaunt the assumptions on which he grounds his study. That beginning was critical of many of his teachers, friends, and associates, whose evasions corrupted their account of religion and contributed to the "dilapidated" intellectual environment. Volumes II and III move back and forth in time both because contemporary intellectual life is formed by the simultaneous presence to us of the thoughts of the past two centuries and because our judgments of all the persistent elements are necessarily retrospective.

Cowling's "deconstruction" is not a sociological work, although at times it depends on higher academic gossip. The many thinkers he treats are not explained merely in terms of underlying causes or social processes, but they are shown to have personal reasons for their views. The thought of individuals is presented as their conclusions, within the cultural environment they inherited, about what the world means to them, and what they think they might do about it. What happens depends on how people choose to think about, and respond to, the conditions they have tried to make the best of. There is a fundamental sense of human agency in Cowling's account, but it is a highly constrained agency. The past can never simply be retrieved. We have to struggle through what we have done for and to ourselves, revising what we have achieved as we decide what is unsatisfactory in the achievement. Which is to say that there is a sense in which history transforms as it describes the past, and hence that it requires faith and courageous outspokenness since there is no "self-ratifying superiority."

Cowling communicates a profound sense of the ordeal of freedom, which is our blessing and our curse. There is little evidence of grace in his account, and a profound regret that the temporality of all things is not made livable through an effective myth of tradition and continuity. Cowling is addressing a world "where reading, viewing and reflecting are more central than prayer or worship" and thus he follows the "most accessible route by which orthodoxy may be restored." Moreover, "it is because theology ought to be, but is not, central that it has been necessary to proceed deviously, to give primary attention to literature, criticism, politics, philosophy, history, poetry and science, and to recognize in all of these evidence of the deliquescence of Christianity." He fights in the intellectual arena for something which has never been merely intellectual. That this is a highly self-conscious age does not mean that it is rational or sensible.

What is the Christianity that is under assault? It is the now receded, established,

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traditional Christian order of England and hence concerns local traditions as much as theology or credal commitments. It is Christianity recollected in hostile circumstances. Cowling's account does not offer a survey of the state of Christianity in modernity altogether. Nevertheless, traditional Christians far beyond England will recognize many features of the intellectual terrain Cowling maps. They have much to learn from his survey.

They will also be sharply challenged by it. Cowling tells us that "A religion ought to be habitual and ought not to involve the self-consciousness inseparable from conversion. What Christianity requires is a second-generation sensibility in which the oddness and arbitrariness of Christianity's doctrines are so much taken for granted that struggle has ceased to be of Christianity's essence." Unfortunately, however, "complication . . . is a leading feature of the religion of the modern English intelligentsia." If Cowling means that Christianity and culture should be so integrated that the tension between being in the world and yet not of the world is reduced to the vanishing point, would this be orthodox Christianity? Would it be compatible with the "two cities" of traditional, first millennium Christianity? Would not Christians themselves question this?

In our time the secular religions of mass media and democratic, popular consumer culture are much more likely to enjoy a "second generation sensibility" than Christianity. Christian orthodoxy as the "taken for granted" will be a long time coming. Orthodoxy in modern culture cannot help but present itself as "contentious and unreasonable." It cannot now be the "taken for granted" if it is ever to achieve being taken for granted. There will be no second-generation sensibility in the short run, and of necessity the orthodox Christian today must adopt the role of Socratic questioner of the secular orthodoxy, becoming the critic of contemporary establishment. This is exactly what Cowling does in these volumes. But this is profoundly in tension with his description of the "English religion" which "includes decency, respectability, mistrust of enthusiasm, an aversion to theory and an even greater aversion to the dogmatic expression of belief." And to the extent that the defenders of traditional Christianity are not really expected to win, they have experienced a "negative melancholy about Christianity's prospects."

On the one hand, then, Cowling addresses a widely acknowledged and familiar theme in modern historical and philosophical writing: the "secularization of the European mind" (to use Owen Chadwick's phrase) or the decline of the directive authority of Christianity in Western societies since the early nineteenth century (a process that, as Cowling notes, had much earlier roots). On the other hand, he pursues the question in a way unique among students of the subject. His three volumes form a sort of biographical encyclopedia of British thought in which the education and work of some 120 writers, scholars, and public figures are summarized in a way that combines literal accuracy with a rhetorical edge that approaches the satirical or even cynical.

In Volume III alone, there is substantial discussion of Carlyle, J. A. Froude, Charles Kingsley, Burke, Disraeli, Thomas and Matthew Arnold, Jowett, Henry Sidgwick, Tennyson, Browning, Pater, Wilde, Green, Macaulay, Acton, Henry Sumner Maine, William Ralph Inge, William Temple, R. H. Tawney, John Neville Figgis, Charles Gore, Alasdair MacIntyre, Freud, Darwin, Popper, F. H. Bradley and A. C. Bradley, Bernard Bosanquet, Vaughan Williams, Keynes, Hayek, Harold Laski, Wittgenstein, F. R. Leavis, Terry Eagleton, B. F. Skinner, Roger Scruton, Isaiah Berlin, and George Steiner, to name forty out of 100 authors for whom extensive bibliographical citations are provided in support of Cowling's analysis.

Whether or not Cowling is sympathetic to an individual's thought, he extracts it from all the attendant poetic or rhetorical features that might make it ingratiating or soften its implications. In the Introduction

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to Volume II, he wrote that:

> A work of this sort ignores the subtleties and coerces the intentions of the thinkers it discusses. It puts a straitjacket on literature and refuses to linger over its complications. It insists on its own interpretation and depends for its power on the plausibility of imposing it on the thinkers whose significance it is designed to illuminate.

Cowling is true to his design.

Cowling's loathing of self-deception, and his desire to escape it, lurks everywhere in this work. One cannot avoid the impression of tension in his thinking between the effort to transcend the merely historical and the fear of deceiving oneself in the effort to do so. The desire for tradition and orthodoxy as the "taken for granted" is the desire for resolution of that which the historian, without grace, will never resolve for himself. The cure of bad thought will necessarily have to be to think further. This is a voice crying in the (academic) wilderness, proclaiming that the way we think now is not good for us.

One may well agree (as I do) with that contention, while remaining uncertain about the Christianity Cowling wishes to defend. What sort of restoration can it be? What exactly does it require of us? Do we ally with the remaining practitioners of ancient Catholic worship (Roman Catholics, Eastern Orthodox, Anglo-Catholics) in necessarily self-conscious fashion? Do we take courage and write polemical, countercultural history in the universities, accepting intellectual martyrdom (and lack of professional advancement)? Certainly the latter is exemplified in this work (about the former Cowling is reticent). As Cowling sees it, the universities might once have been concrete manifestations of an ideal life, affording escape from the tyranny of social order.

But the truth that would make us free came to seem a "bias" towards the close of the nineteenth century and the modern university has experimented with the ideal of "bias against bias." More and more, however, the question looms "whether the modern secular university is more antagonistic to truth than the confessional university which it has replaced and whether impartiality and the academically level playing-field are not chimeras." Again, "One of the assumptions of *Religion and Public Doctrine* is that academic impartiality is an illusion and that the bias against bias registers either a tired conventionality or an agenda which conceals its purpose."

Cowling's discussion is reminiscent of Alasdair MacIntyre's attack on the liberal "enlightened" university. In *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry*, MacIntyre convicted the modern universities of collapsing into the equally abhorrent, mutually refuting, "encyclopedic" and "genealogical" approaches to learning. He called for a debate between these and his version of the Aristotelian/Augustinian/Thomistic tradition of inquiry. MacIntyre asserted this last to be superior to both the others because it is able to absorb whatever is valid in them without losing its own identity while they could not absorb his alternative without destroying their apparent coherence. There is a touching rationalist faith in the challenge to debate which MacIntyre throws down to the rival versions.

Cowling is sympathetic to MacIntyre—up to a point. He acknowledges MacIntyre's strategy as one possible way forward. He rejects MacIntyre's residual Marxism, but can almost befriend him on the principle that the enemy of my enemy is my friend. Still, Cowling thinks that MacIntyre has deceived himself:

> Certainly he understands that Liberalism is an oppressive and exclusive ideology. But equally certainly he seems not to take into account the depth of its entrenchment, the disguises it takes and the extent to which his tactical demand for conflict involves substantive acceptance of its inconclusiveness.

For even where the language of the universities is post-Liberal, "humane studies in modern universities are in the grip of a

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secular correctness which detaches morality from religion, does not really expect anything new to happen (except in rhetoric) and leaves its mark on morality even where morality remains attached to religion."

One of Cowling's chief targets is what he calls the "higher secularism." This manifests itself, for example, in the beliefs of Vaughan Williams, Elgar, and Charles Parry—who, among others, believed that music could fill the gap left by Christianity's decline—and in William Morris's demand for greater prominence for art and the cult of beauty in opposition to the dominance of the profit motive. Cowling sees this also in Wordsworth's greatest poetry which was subversive, "less Christian than the God of Paradise Lost," and closer to Hardy or Kipling.

Cowling also detects the higher secularism at work in the historical writings of the "agnostic" Frederick Maitland and in Keynes who, "though ostensibly the servant of economic technicality, was in truth the slave of a moral or quasi-religious intention." Both Hayek and Michael Oakeshott rejected socialism as inappropriate to replace the failed Anglican/aristocratic establishment. Nevertheless, Hayek, whose views are "antipathetic" to everything Cowling stands for, admitted at best a past role for a religion that could no longer play any but a marginal part. And Oakeshott, who unlike Hayek was residually Augustinian and thus both more sympathetic to religion and less naive about politics, was a disengaged "nihilist" whose conservatism was so indefinite that it "could operate within the interstices of any system." Their opposition to socialism did not lead them to the needed alternative religious construct, Hayek because he did not see the need, Oakeshott because he professed not to know how to meet it.

Experience has shown that economic doctrines of socialism are flawed. But what persists right through to Tony Blair is a sense in socialists of religious idealism and virtuousness which is much harder to defeat than any policy arguments. While one of socialism's dispositions is to destroy Christianity, another, perhaps more powerful tendency in its English version, is to amalgamate Christianity to itself in the shape of a new kind of cultural commitment which disdains commercialism even though remaining dependent on a productive economy. Oakeshott, Hayek, and others like them could not produce the needed alternative to this high-mindedness. The otherwise appealing character of their skeptical critiques will always be dogged by the lack of religious sentiment which they were incapable of producing.

Cowling's vast, exhausting survey is designed to overwhelm the reader with evidence that there is no escape from religion and so whatever post-Christian and anti-Christian thinkers may think they are doing, in their self-consciously secular rhetoric they "in fact [are] contributing to a transformation within religion." The sympathetic reader will agree long before getting to the end of this volume (let alone all three), and may wonder whether the effectiveness of the argument is advanced or impaired by the mountain of commentary. Traditional Christians will find support—in a way. But they cannot be sure that Cowling would approve their explicit expressions of faith as either adequate responses to the crisis of our time or valid manifestations of his deviously implicit faith.

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Do architecture critics matter?

by Francis Morrone

Walter Kerr, the drama critic for *The New York Herald Tribune* and *The New York Times* from the 1950s through the 1980s, once said that the difference between a reviewer and a critic is that the former assumes his reader has not seen or read or heard the work in question and the latter assumes he has. In this sense, those who comment for daily newspapers on theater, art, books, or films are almost invariably reviewers, not critics. Such reviewers have long been staples of the popular press. Architectural commentary, however, has not been nearly such a staple.

In the nineteenth century, Montgomery Schuyler wrote discerning commentary for *The New York World* and *The New York Times*, as well as for specialized publications. In the next century, *The New Yorker* magazine made up somewhat for the lack of architectural commentary at the dailies by having first George Chappell and then Lewis Mumford write the "Skyline" column. This dearth only began to change in the early 1960s when *The New York Times* hired Ada Louise Huxtable to be its architecture critic. Huxtable made a splash at the *Times*, writing about her subject at a fraught time for American cities. The "urban crisis" was in full swing. Popular discontent with the unlovely products of modernist architects and planners was at a fever pitch. Preservation, particularly in the wake of the destruction of New York's Pennsylvania Station, was becoming a *cause célèbre*. Jane Jacobs had taught the public to be very wary of "urban renewal." Huxtable entered upon this battlefield equipped with a discriminating modernist judgment, knowledge of architectural history, strong preservationist sympathies, and, above all, a razor-sharp, often brutally sarcastic, prose style. It seemed suited to the embittered times. I believe that it was her paeans to preservation rather than her spirited defense of the glass-box "vernacular" that made her so popular among a broad readership of middle-class New Yorkers—the same who might have disregarded her denigration of Lincoln Center as they stood, happily, in its plazas before concerts discussing her latest column. Her writings earned her, in 1970, the very first Pulitzer Prize to be awarded in the new category of "criticism." To date, thirty-one such Pulitzers have been handed out, and a remarkably high percentage have gone to architecture critics—six, to be precise.

In 1979 the award went to the *Chicago Tribune*'s Paul Gapp, a reporter turned critic who wrote entirely unaffected commentary with none of Huxtable's glittering Manhattan sophistication. Five years later, Huxtable's successor at the *Times*, Paul Goldberger, won the award. Not nearly so sharp or sassy as his predecessor, Goldberger championed the "postmodernism" of the 1980s but otherwise paid Huxtable's same obeisances to preservation, contextualism, and a Jacobsean urbanism. (Goldberger is the current keeper of *The New*

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Yorker's "Skyline" flame while Huxtable still writes occasional pieces for *The Wall Street Journal*.) In 1990 Allan Temko of *The San Francisco Chronicle* won the award, followed by *The Boston Globe*'s Robert Campbell in 1996. The last architecture critic to receive the award was the *Chicago Tribune*'s Blair Kamin, in 1999.

It is a curious thing that while we have book *reviewers* and film *reviewers* and theater *reviewers*, we do not have architecture *reviewers*—only *critics*. Blair Kamin writes in the preface to his new book *Why Architecture Matters*[1] that "the very term 'architecture critic' may be a misnomer." "We are," Kamin writes, "urban critics as much as architecture critics." In this sense, then, an "urban critic" can hardly be a "reviewer." If it is the "built environment" (that inelegant term!) about which such critics write, then his readers' familiarity with it, as the place in which they live, work, and play, must be assumed. Otherwise, "urban criticism" becomes a species of armchair travel writing.

In the 1960s, Ada Louise Huxtable appealed to the activist tenor of the times, in that she appeared fearless, going after big developers and high officials, using her *Times* soapbox to try to effect positive changes in New York's public environment, and showing that an "urban critic" had to be a political critic as well. In his preface, Blair Kamin notes his own commitment to "activist criticism," borrowing the term from Allan Temko. Kamin writes:

> Activist criticism is based on the idea that architecture affects everyone and therefore should be understandable to everyone. It analyzes architecture as a fine art and as a social art, placing buildings in the context of the politics, the economics, and the cultural forces that shape them. Activist criticism invites readers to be more than consumers who passively accept the buildings that are handed to them. It bids them, instead, to become citizens who take a leading role in shaping their surroundings. Its fundamental purposes are these: to stop hideous buildings and urban spaces from disfiguring the landscape, and to introduce constructive alternatives into the public debate.

In his next paragraph Kamin goes on:

> When you are an activist critic, you do not wait for mistakes to happen and then bemoan the results after the fact. You whack at the offending party with the journalistic equivalent of a two-by-four. In addition to hammering away at bad plans, however, an activist critic is obliged to point the way to good ones. Besides the two-by-four, in other words, the tools of the trade include a searchlight.

The activist critic, thus, like all activists, leads the blind public toward what is good for it. It's the merest lip service to talk about "citizens who take a leading role in shaping their surroundings." Huxtable never adopted a populist stance, as we can see in the first paragraph of her piece entitled "Boston City Hall: A Winner," from the *Times* of February 8, 1969:

> "Whatever it is, it's not beautiful," said the Boston cab driver taking the visitor to the new City Hall. "What would you call it, Gothic?" asked another. Which about sums up the architectural gap, or abyss, as it exists between those who design and those who use the twentieth-century's buildings.

For Huxtable, of course, the onus of that abyss rests not with the designers, but with the public. And here's the crux of what makes architecture criticism so damnably tricky. Kamin is of course right that architecture should be understandable to everyone. Only an idiot (such as the typical modern architect, but we'll leave that alone for the moment) would fail to see that buildings aren't works of fine art in the same sense that easel paintings are or poems or pieces of concert music. It is for the very simple reason that buildings must serve

1 *Why Architecture Matters*, by Blair Kamin; The University of Chicago Press, 386 pages, $37.50.

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practical functions that have nothing to do with fine art and that they are utterly inescapable, unlike the paintings in museums or the books on library shelves. The urban architect simply does not possess the right to impose his aesthetic vision on the public. Or does he? Huxtable would have answered that he does and that it is the critic's job to educate the public to understand buildings. Thus, the cabbie in Boston isn't the victim of arrogant architects, but of failed education. The poor slob thinks it's Gothic! Yet, how much of the public can any critic reach? Huxtable reached only those readers of the *Times* who read its cultural pages—and few readers, one should think, of the *Daily News* or the *Post*. Readers like the Boston cabbie, in other words. Huxtable's contempt for the cabbie was palpable. Her interest was in educating the "educable" part of the public—the rest be damned. Again, if it's paintings or books or music we're talking about, then such high-brow attitudinizing is not only all right, it's probably necessary. But architecture is another matter, and that's why it ought to be, as Roger Scruton has pointed out, the most convention-bound and tradition-bound of all the arts, but I may be getting ahead of the game here.

Kamin is not so hifalutin as Huxtable. He doesn't talk down to his readers and is seldom sarcastic. He seems, most of the time, genuinely interested in effecting some sort of dialogue between the people and the architects. He has the whole voice-of-moderation style down pat. His sentences, if they neither sing nor zing, communicate plainly and well. And unlike Huxtable or Goldberger or the man presently installed at *The New York Times*, he ventures about his city, to its neighborhoods and ghettoes, and writes with as much seriousness of those places' humble streets and houses as he does of the big, brand-name buildings downtown. Kamin was named the *Tribune*'s architecture critic in 1992, when he was only thirty-five years old. Sixty-one of his *Tribune* pieces have been gathered together into *Why Architecture Matters*. Most of these pieces are reprinted with brief postscripts updating their stories or providing additional information. The book is very handsomely produced, on coated stock with superb illustrations. The pieces are grouped into eighteen sections that are themselves divided into four parts: "The Evolving Metropolis," "The Art of Architecture," "Architecture as a Social Art," and "The Lakefront: Democratic Vistas." All but the second of these parts deals exclusively with Chicago. That second part, "The Art of Architecture," while mostly about Chicago, also takes us along on Kamin's expense-account jaunts to Washington, D.C., New York, Cincinnati, Berlin, and—ugh!—Bilbao.

In Washington, Kamin praises James Ingo Freed's Holocaust Memorial Museum. In New York, he praises James Stewart Polshek's Rose Center for Earth and Space. In Berlin, he praises the Nürnberg-born Chicago architect Helmut Jahn's Sony Center. And in Cincinnati he—hallelujah!—blasts Peter Eisenman's pretentious and badly constructed Aronoff Center. He notes not only that the building is made of cheap materials—which he lamentably fails to identify—but also that its very "deconstructivist" forms are inherently unstable and, even worse, inspire little respect from the buildings' users, who have covered the walls with graffiti. "The plaza," Kamin writes, "is stark and uninviting, a *Blade Runner* landscape that adds to our sense of chaos rather than creating an oasis of civility." It is nice to know that there are still architecture critics who can write a sentence like that and mean it as condemnation. Herbert Muschamp might use the identical words but mean them as high praise! Still, it slightly rankles that Kamin feels obliged to note that Eisenman is "brilliant." Also, Kamin feels obliged to contrast Eisenman's failure with the success of another building on the same University of Cincinnati campus, Frank Gehry's Vontz Center.

Back in Chicago, Kamin, like most architecture critics writing today, spends a

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great deal of time bemoaning what is called "retro" design, as well as the inability of our architects and planners to "take risks." He wants his architecture and his cities to be "forward looking." And that something should be "Disneyfied" is the most horrible fate of all. This is the critical lockstep of today—indeed, it can sometimes be a challenge to tell one of these Pulitzer Prize critics from another. Herbert Muschamp, of course, is its most egregious exemplar. And if it at first seems patently unfair to liken Kamin to Muschamp—Kamin is a much better critic than Muschamp—then a close reading of *Why Architecture Matters* reveals that many of the same intellectual tics are present. While Kamin would never write something so pernicious as "Patriotism would have greater depth right now if our surroundings reflected a more modern and progressive outlook" (Muschamp in the wake of the September 11 terrorist attacks), he will nonetheless bemoan the "retro skyscrapers, retro ballparks, retro condominiums, and retro libraries that looked as if they had been designed at the turn of the century—the last one."

How can a critic get away with so blithely stating what is so patently untrue, that these "retro" buildings, however much they may wish to evoke the spirit of old-fashioned architecture, actually look nothing like their putative models? (That this, in my own estimation, may be their whole problem is more a matter of critical disagreement.) But on and on he bangs away at the "progressive" theme: "Chicago made its reputation as a city that fearlessly embraced the future"—what can that possibly mean? And why is that good? In recent years, Kamin tells us, the city has muffed "chance after chance to live up to its legacy of risk-taking innovation." There are too many "backward-looking buildings." He writes of "the turn-back-the-clock, retro remake of State Street." Thomas Beeby's Harold Washington Library "is architecture in a time warp—its leaden façade seemingly built at the close of the nineteenth century."

And on and on goes Kamin, railing against the city's loss of nerve, the responsibility for which loss he often places squarely with the mayor, Richard M. Daley. Kamin looks back to the reign of the present mayor's father, Richard J. Daley, as a kind of golden age of Chicago architecture. Daley *père* was interested in giving Chicago a progressive face, and sponsored major works by Mies van der Rohe and his principal acolytes. How the times have changed! The elder Daley was once discounted as a solecism-spouting backroom boss who destroyed Chicago neighborhoods through ill-conceived large-scale "urban renewal" schemes and a racist disregard for providing amenities to minority communities. But now he is held up as a paragon of architectural vision—as patron No. 1 of the last great age of "cutting edge" architecture in Chicago. Again, Kamin here sounds like no one so much as his *New York Times* counterpart with his paeans to Nelson Rockefeller and Wallace Harrison. The present mayor, incidentally, is someone who has made "quality of life" a central theme of his administration and in so doing has taken an activist role in many urban design decisions—just as his father did. But the younger Daley promotes "retro design" and "comfort architecture," clean streets and extensive plantings. This of course delights most Chicagoans, though you'd never guess that from reading Blair Kamin.

On November 11, 2000, the Chicago chapter of the American Institute of Architects held an "Architecture Critics Forum," entitled "Where in the World Is Chicago?," on the question of why Chicago has lost its role as an international pacesetter in architecture. I did not attend this conference, but I have read the transcript of the proceedings. The main panel was made up of four critics—Kamin, Lee Bey (Kamin's counterpart at the city's other daily, the *Sun-Times*), Robert Campbell, and Herbert Muschamp. Each man spoke of what Chicago means to him, and whined about the present situation, in which in Chicago and in the country as a whole there is too

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little "progressive" work being done, that all the action is in Europe. Muschamp said that the situation in New York was, if anything, even worse than the situation in Chicago—that nothing of much value had been done since the 1960s (just as Kamin is wont to say of Chicago).

The question no one was interested in, though, was whether Chicago ever really was the architectural pacesetter it is so often claimed to have been. As a native of Chicago and as someone who agrees with the historian Paul Johnson that, but for its climate, Chicago would be the most livable city in the United States, such a question interests me very much. As I see it, Chicago has indeed been home to some great architects, including Louis Sullivan, Daniel Burnham, and David Adler. Still, its reputation has been exaggerated. Chicago is called the "Windy City" not because of its wind—which isn't so great. Rather, it is because of Chicagoans' boastfulness about their city. This boastfulness emerged in the late nineteenth century when Chicago grew at a phenomenal rate and seemed poised to overtake New York as the nation's largest city. When, however, New York expanded itself in 1898 to include Brooklyn (and other places), it left Chicago in the dust. It was then that Chicagoans adopted their "Second City" mentality, and the boastfulness, far from abating, intensified.

In a classic case of an inferiority complex, Chicagoans looked for approbation in whatever quarter they could find it. And when European art historians suggested that the late nineteenth-century commercial buildings of the Chicago Loop were an integral part of the pedigree of modernist architecture, far more so than the decked-out, classicizing skyscrapers of New York, well, that was all Chicago needed to start promoting itself as the Architectural Capital of America. A Chicago businessman named Walter Paepcke, seeking to elevate his city's cultural image, brought in two men to do *just that:* he imported Mortimer Adler from New York to set up the University of Chicago's "Great Books" program and he brought Ludwig Mies van der Rohe over from Nazi Germany to head up the architecture school at the Armour Institute. (Both Adler and Mies happened to be devotees of the French Thomist philosopher Jacques Maritain, but that's a story for another day.) With Mies installed on the South Side, historians could now look to what Louis Sullivan said at the time of the 1893 Columbian Exposition—that the damage caused to Chicago by the fair's Beaux-Arts triumphalism would take fifty years to undo. Fifty years later, and there was Mies, designing the new campus for the Armour Institute (now the Illinois Institute of Technology) and poised to be formgiver to the Chicago of Daley *père*. Mies and the "Mieslings" (as Tom Wolfe called them) and firms like Skidmore, Owings & Merrill and C. F. Murphy Associates then set out to remake Chicago's downtown skyline in cool renditions of Bauhaus precepts that made New York's forays in similar directions, by firms like Emery Roth & Sons, seem like Crackerjack versions in comparison.

It is now a truism among commentators on Chicago architecture—not least Blair Kamin—that Mies and his acolytes represented a continuation, if not a fulfillment, of Chicago traditions. But could Louis Sullivan truly have foretold that his stunted promise would be fulfilled by a 1920s coterie of dour intellectuals from Weimar? The whole narrative has always seemed to me to be more than a little contrived, which then begs the question of why so many educated and intelligent critics and historians continue to lap it up so enthusiastically. The answer, I think, is to be found in their desire to be "progressive," and such a desire is at root political, not aesthetic. Like the socialist Nikolaus Pevsner, today's critics and historians adopt a Hegelian/Marxian view of social progress which they then analogize to the arts. Thus all the talk—otherwise quite unfathomable—about art and architecture that is either "retrogressive" or "forward looking." What is strange in a critic like Kamin lamenting the "retro"

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quality of certain buildings is that to do so is to employ a nineteenth-century historicist standard more "retro" than which one cannot get.

Finally, I have to say that nothing in Kamin's book struck me more than his acknowledgments section. It is breathtaking. It goes on for six pages and lists no fewer than 198 names, including "Mark Lynch and Robert Drugan, with whom I body-surfed at Sandy Hook." Yikes! I am exactly the same age as Blair Kamin, and I don't think I've even *met* 198 people in my life. And of the fewer than 198 people I've met, I usually feel that on any given writing project I may wish to thank perhaps one or two of them. Indeed, in my last book I decided to do away with the acknowledgments page altogether. (And it has *never* even occurred to me to list all my siblings, let alone all my wife's siblings.) I'm not being facetious here. I just can't imagine that a self-respecting critic would want to thank 198 people. For interest's sake, I pulled from my bookshelves some random volumes of collected criticism. First was John Simon's *Uneasy Stages*, his collection of theater reviews. No acknowledgments at all. I figured maybe this was because he'd already written several books and had had done with the acknowledgments game. So I looked at an early volume of Simon pieces, *Acid Test*. No acknowledgments. Roger Sale, in *On Not Being Good Enough*, thanks two editors who printed his pieces. No one else—nothing about body surfing. Ada Louise Huxtable's *Will They Ever Finish Bruckner Boulevard?* has no acknowledgments, and that was her first collection of architecture pieces. The critic Paul Fussell once wrote that "We need, to put it simply, a John Simon of architectural criticism." It won't be somebody with 198 people to thank.

Forthcoming in *The New Criterion:*

The survival of culture: a series
by Robert Bork & Roger Kimball
F. A. Hayek *by Kenneth Minogue*
How good was Robert Surtees? *by Tim Congdon*
"A mild and harmless relativism"? *by Scott Campbell*
The legacy of John Steinbeck *by Keith Windschuttle*
Gerhard Richter *by Karen Wilkin*

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New poems
by Charles Tomlinson & Moore Moran

If Bach had been a beekeeper

If Bach had been a beekeeper
he would have heard
all those notes
suspended above one another
in the air of his ear
as the differentiated swarm returning
to the exact hive
and place in the hive,
topping up the cells
with the honey of C major,
food for the listening generations,
key to their comfort
and solace of their distress
as they return and return
to those counterpointed levels
of hovering wings where
movement is dance
and the air itself
a scented garden

—*Charles Tomlinson*

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The runners at San Benedetto

Two runners are crossing the shore by night:
  Their sound on sand, their lithe iambics gauge
The certainty of arrival and return
  Before the wide encroachment of the waters
Smooths out their footprint frontier. Cloud
  Keeps dulling the cusps of a moon
Just risen. A steadier glow
  From the endless necklace of the lungomare,
A fitful one from the circling beam
  Of a lighthouse that dapples keels
Close-packed, rocking at anchor.
  For lovers crossing the shore by night,
None of this is their concern. They see
  In the unpaved pathway a chosen destiny:
They choose each other and this place,
  Place to return to and by night re-pace
In the twilit ritual that runs between
  The competing geometries of shore and sky
Where the first stars prick their courses.
  Lovers, how many years of light
Await you behind that sky I cannot say:
  Your compact with the dark will guide you where
Beneath time's leisurely eye, the common day
  Tests this accord that was confirmed by night.

—*Charles Tomlinson*

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The Etruscan graveyard at Marzabotto

At the dump, the packaged waste
as neat as war-graves
awaits destruction:
the drone of a generator
insists on efficiency, promises
to destroy all traces:
on the spring wind
there is one other sound,
the whisper of discarded cellophane
like the voices of the dead
shiny and shivering with the season.
On the hill-top remain
in a fold of land
graves that are blocks of tufa,
the dark rock splashed
with ring on ring of orange
from the lichen
that thrives on nothing. One might choose
to lie here and be reclaimed by earth,
as clean as the emptiness
within each box of stone
that has no lid, but lies
open to the dateless sky
that has forgotten
how far their race once spread
who, dead, so succinctly occupy
so small a space.

—*Charles Tomlinson*

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Late in the night

Late in the night I dreamed I was to die,
to see through change to the unchanging season
where love is said to live and reign (blue sky
is for the called no less than for the chosen);
my love lay with me softly, murmuring
in sleep of cherished seasons come and gone,
sweet passings which in time soured, corrupting
our hands and lips and eyes. Who to atone?
Between two worlds I hovered, tried to hedge,
but no scheme came, only the terror in
surrendering what I am, heartbreak serrating
awareness to a raw and mortal edge,
and I, dense tangle of transgressions, waiting
for the dark, the accusation or the grin.

—*Moore Moran*

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Theater

A peerless phraser & a Disney remake

by Mark Steyn

Theater economics making only marginally more sense than the West Virginia steel business, soon everything will be one-man shows. Right now it just feels that way. By the time it's literally true, it may be that some far-sighted and bargain-minded producers will be cutting costs and offering us the no-man show—*An Evening Without Rosie O'Donnell, Ian McKellen Stays Home*, etc. But for now one can be reasonably sure that the advertised attraction—Bea Arthur, Kevin Bacon, Steven Berkoff, Alan King, Elaine Stritch—will show up.

With the exception of Kevin Bacon, I'm not sure any of the above is a star. And Bacon, with his long list of appealingly trashy movies, isn't a Broadway star. But then there aren't any Broadway stars any more. Inheriting by default are a select group of indestructible old broads who've been around, or at least nearby. They're growly and gravelly, smoky and boozy. They talk dirty. They have anecdotes. (I was once on a radio show where the elderly actress, her interview cut short before she'd got in her big Olivier story, protested, "But I haven't told my Larry!") And, of course, they sing Stephen Sondheim's "I'm Still Here," usually as the finale: "First you're another/ Sloe-eyed vamp/ Then someone's mother/ Then you're camp."

"Not long ago, I spoke to Stephen Sondheim," says the star of *Elaine Stritch at Liberty*, introducing the number at the Neil Simon, "and I told him I had heard women in their sixties, fifties, *forties* sing 'I'm Still Here.' Still here? I mean, where they have *been*?" Miss Stritch, seventy-seven, sings "I'm Still Here" at the top of Act Two.

At the Booth, the star of *Bea Arthur on Broadway: Just Between Friends* goes Stritch one better. The parting words of Miss Arthur, seventy-eight, are: "Thank you all for coming." A pause. "And I'm not going to sing 'I'm Still Here.'"

At such moments *Stritch* and *Arthur* seem to merge into one almighty two-woman show mutually sniping across the Great White Way. The biggest song of Bea Arthur's career is: "Who else but your Bosom Buddy/ Would sit down and tell you the truth?"

But "Bosom Buddies" (from *Mame*) was a duet, with Angela Lansbury, and at the Booth Miss Arthur gives it a shot as a solo before reluctantly abandoning it. Happily, thanks to Miss Stritch seven blocks north, something of the flavor of "Bosom Buddies"—old broads disparaging each other's career high spots—survives. Stritch tells at one point of blowing a shot at TV fame as well as a ton of money by using too many naughty words in an interview for a sitcom about older women in Florida. The show was *The Golden Girls* and they wound up giving the role to Bea Arthur, her second big TV success, after *Maude* in the Seventies, in which she became the first sitcom heroine to enjoy the benefits of "a woman's right to choose." Here is what Miss Arthur has to say

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about her TV days: "It was so creatively rewarding. I mean, working with enormously talented people—writers, directors, actors, producers—doing material that was bright, witty, provocative, literate, sophisticated, adult and daring."

That's it? That's all she has to say when she's "just between friends"? For that penetrating aperçu, you need a writer? Actually, it's not entirely clear who wrote what on this show, but at least several of those credited are professional authors. The billing reads "Created by Bea Arthur and Billy Goldenberg" (her pianist) but "in collaboration with Charles Randolph Wright" and "production consultants Mark Waldrop and Richard Maltby, Jr." I can't imagine Maltby, co-author of *Miss Saigon* and director of *Ain't Misbehavin'*, either writing that creatively rewarding/ enormously talented/ rewardingly enormous boilerplate or approving it. But it sums up the bland generic flavor of this stage memoir, as well as reminding us that, though she may once have worked with enormously talented writers and directors doing witty, provocative material, she certainly isn't now.

By contrast, *Elaine Stritch at Liberty* bears the credit "Constructed by John Lahr and reconstructed by Elaine Stritch," which, one assumes, means the material was organized by Lahr and then Stritch came in and junked this, inserted that, and amended the other. Now I yield to no one in my contempt for John Lahr. As readers of October's "Notes & Comments" will recall, his reaction to the events of September 11, as they were unfolding on his TV screen, was to wonder whether the whole thing wasn't staged by Bush to distract attention from Democratic criticism of the Administration's missile defence plans. The glimpse of what I called in *The Daily Telegraph* "the dead, fetid heart of John Lahr" was not pretty.

But, that said, he's done a cracking job shaping Miss Stritch's life into a dramatic arc with more going on than most plays. Richard Maltby, on the other hand, one of the nicest fellows in show business, has put his name to a colorless stinker. There's no point complaining about Lahr's politics: pretty much everyone in the theater is a partisan leftie of the most tedious sort, so the only distinction that counts is between a tedious leftie who's efficient and a tedious leftie who's incompetent. On the face of it, Bea Arthur has the more promising material—she had two big TV hits and co-starred in *Mame* and *Fiddler on the Roof*. In comparison, Miss Stritch's big sitcom was in Britain, and, although Noel Coward wrote a show for her, it was *Sail Away*, not *Private Lives*. Nevertheless, her resume has now been transformed into, as she describes it, "a play about Elaine Stritch. I was right for it and I got the part."

Her director, George C. Wolfe, eschews his recent specialty of missing the point of whatever he's staging and shows off his star unfussily. She wears a man's white shirt and sheer black tights to show off an impressive pair of chorus girl's gams. Some years ago, I dropped by a rehearsal for a charity show and that's exactly what Miss Stritch was wearing then—big wobbly breasts vibrating like a California earthquake every time she told a dirty joke. At the Neil Simon, it's a calculatedly casual look, formally informal. Her opening is the biggest cliché of all—"There's No Business Like Show Business"—but entirely stripped of its anthemic awards-ceremony quality: it's relaxed, jaunty, personal, interrupted by asides as underneath the band vamps happily. The audience settle back in their chairs, assured that there's rich business in Stritch business. The opening sums up the show's approach to her life: familiar material—old songs, showbiz anecdotes, too much booze, too much sex—but adroitly arranged and turned intensely personal.

She was a Catholic girl from the Midwest, and her upbringing retained enough of a grip that she didn't yield her virginity until the age of thirty-one, frustrating among others Marlon Brando, who on one date was reduced to crushing a wine glass in his hand and, as he leaked blood all over the table-

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cloth, mumbling, "I'm sorry, Elaine." In those days, she thought "heterosexual" was the technical term for "gay" (over thirty years later, the Princess of Wales labored under the same misapprehension). She dropped Ben Gazzara for Rock Hudson. "We all know what a bum decision that turned out to be," she says and bangs her head against her high chair (her only prop). When she finally finds love, it's with an obscure English actor, so she spends a critical phase of her career in London with nothing much to do but British telly. And then, after ten blissful years, he dies. For most of this time, she also had a "drinking problem," to such a degree that she could even out-consume such legendary round-the-clockers as Judy Garland. "Elaine, I never thought I'd say this," Judy told her after an evening cocktail or two had gone until some time after dawn, "but goodnight."

As she says, this is a play about Elaine Stritch, and she is the principal character: at the back of your mind, you know she's not being confessional, but playing confessional; few acts play better than self-exposure. But one of the clues that Miss Stritch is the real deal is the number of bad career moves she's made, going right back to her inability to resist pointing out an underrehearsed Gloria Swanson's hamminess while sharing a stage with her in Dayton during a summer production of Clare Boothe Luce's *The Women*. Even when discursing on the booze, she's got the tone just right: rueful, not maudlin, no Oprahfying, no twelve-stepping, and brightened by a shrewd choice of songs—the familiar ones sound new, and the unfamiliar are a treat, like "There Never Was A Baby Like My Baby" by Jule Styne, Betty Comden, and Adolph Green. She seems to want to prove that the brassy rasper of Broadway legend is not the whole story. She knows how to be tender and understated and, if she hasn't got Peggy Lee's voice, she's a peerless phraser.

Bea Arthur's problem is that, if you see Stritch first, Miss Arthur is like the Disney PG remake. There's the naughty schoolgirl who plunges headlong into the prank that gets her expelled, and the naughty schoolgirl who knows never to go far enough to harm her prospects of being prefect. Miss Arthur is firmly in the latter camp. If Elaine Stritch has been cast in the play of Elaine Stritch's life, Bea Arthur is the one who'd play her in the TV version. She's the one who wants the sitcom badly enough *not* to say "fuck" in the audition. The subtitle of *Bea Arthur on Broadway: Just Between Friends* promises intimacy, and indeed Miss Arthur has literally kicked her shoes off—she appears barefoot. But it becomes clear early on that she sees herself as a franchise called "Bea Arthur," and she regards anything surprising, counterintuitive, or personal as unnecessarily risky. Glimpses of any private life are confined to her confession that "I was a very shy child." Then she arches an eyebrow and stares at us, as if daring her fans to believe her.

As with Stritch, the tone is set by the opening number, which is, in fact, an opening recipe. "I'd like to talk to you about lamb," she drawls. "Specifically, leg of." She then delivers a recipe from Julia Child's *Mastering the Art of French Cooking*. "Put it into a 350-degree oven for half an hour." Pause. "I like it slightly pink." Pause. "Of course, if you like it better done," she adds, "an extra half-hour should do it."

Miss Arthur is proving a point here—that she could read out the phone book and it would be funny. In his recently published diaries, the late Kenneth Tynan observed: "Any actress with a deep voice is always hailed by male critics for her wit, shrewdness, intellectuality—simply because she sounds like a man." Very true. But, more to the point, any actress with a deep voice is always assumed to be dirty. When Bea Arthur starts talking about 350-degree ovens and slightly pink meat, she knows the audience will be falling around with laughter in a way that it wouldn't if Shirley Jones were reading recipes. In what amounts to the nearest thing to any structure in the evening, she returns, for her finale, to the leg of lamb, with tips for leftovers. Between these brack-

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ets, everything falls into place: first she tells us she can get a laugh out of anything; then she boasts how much she can wring out of leftovers. This is hardly news to anyone who's sat through the intervening ninety minutes: there's the taxi-driver, nun, and oral sex joke, and the Pia Zadora/Anne Frank story, which surely qualifies as the world's most overtold theatrical anecdote. This is very old mutton dressed as lamb, and neither rare nor well done. The same can be said of the songs—other people's showstoppers ("Poor Jenny," "Rose's Turn") with any nuance bellowed out of them.

For Stritch, comedy is an unguent, a salve for life's stings. For Arthur, comedy's a suit of armor. The puzzler is that our Bea, having gone to so much trouble to insulate her act from anything human, seems to think that she's the one who's connecting with life, with the big subjects, the issues confronting us all. If the show has any theme, it's her "braveness." Well, not just hers, but between her and Norman Lear they pretty much sewed up braveness for the Seventies. "The mail we got!" she preens. She believes in abortion, though not enough to call it that, preferring the genteel evasion of "the right to choose." (Sitcom-activist-wise, I prefer Cybill Shepherd, who disdains the pro-choice label and proudly proclaims herself pro-abortion.) But, whatever you call it, it took a lot of "courage" to go head to head with your network about it. And even today we cannot rest, because there is still "fear, and hatred, and ignorance." So now Bea Arthur is displaying even more bravery by supporting . . . gay rights! In front of a New York audience! Can you believe it? She wants us to know that she's in favor of Vermont's recent legislation on same-sex civil unions, though, unlike most on her side of the argument, with their vague platitudes about "tolerance" and "social justice," Miss Arthur, uniquely, cites Tallulah Bankhead: "It's not the cock and it's not the twat. It's the eyes," Tallulah told her, "and sometimes the smell of lilac."

"And now," adds Bea, after passing on this insight, "I've offended at least a few of you." I looked around me. Typical Broadway crowd: Jewish ladies, lotsa gays. All roaring their heads off—she said "twat"!—and not an offended theatergoer in sight.

Pandering disguised as fearlessness is never a pretty sight. It is, alas, one of the limitations of comedy: if humor lies in recognition, then what we recognize first and easiest is our own predispositions. It doesn't take courage to use naughty words and cite Tallulah and trumpet gay rights to a New York audience, or to contend that those who feel differently do so only out of fear, hatred, and ignorance. It would take courage to stand on the Booth stage and muse on what Tallulah would have made of the strange urge to suburban respectability of today's gays. While we're at it, as several of my *New Criterion* colleagues well know, it takes courage to go to American university campuses and disagree with the Arthurian line on gays, abortion, and the general hatefulness of conservatives. Not courage in the storming-caves-in-Tora-Bora sense, but certainly more courage than anything on display at the Booth.

The last time I ran into Elaine Stritch was on a BBC show just after the last presidential election, in the chad-dimpling phase. Miss Stritch sang a bit of the first song she introduced on Broadway, in *Angel in the Wings* (1947), an early example of American interest in multiculturalism:

> Bongo Bongo Bongo
> I don't want to leave the Congo
> Oh-no-no-no-no-no
> Bingo Bango Bongo
> I'm so happy in the Congo
> I refuse to go.

"Wonderful song," I sighed contentedly. "Carl Sigman."

"How did you know that?" asked Miss Stritch, amazed. Later, off-air, the conversation turned to politics. "You know," she said, "you're full of crap. But you know who wrote 'Bongo Bongo Bongo.'" (I'll take that as my epitaph.) I don't doubt that Elaine

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Stritch believes everything Bea Arthur does—on gays, conservatives, you name it. She told us she'd just run into Woody and Soon-Yi. "It hasn't made a bit of difference to his career."

"That's right," said Michael Feinstein. "Still no one goes to see his films."

But Stritch isn't so dumb as to figure anyone wants policy statements from her. At the Neil Simon, all the social-issue stuff—gays, alcoholism—is rooted in experience: of gays she's dated, benders she's survived. The specific always beats the general, and that's a lesson that six decades in show business has failed to impart to Bea Arthur.

Speaking of showbiz lefties, allow me to hail the very opposite of a limousine liberal: Steven Berkoff. I've written about him before, a man of limited talent, which he enjoys to the limit, and good for him. Back in town for a one-man show called *One Man* (at the Culture Project), Berkoff gives us three variable solo turns that feature all the usual Berkovian mannerisms—bisyllabic words drawn out longer than operatic melismas, slow-motion movements, tongue-waggling, eye-popping, tremendous bovver-boy aggression, and general scenery-chewing.

The curtain-raiser, an adaptation of Poe's *Tell-Tale Heart*, is a disappointment: the conceit, I think, is that it's a period adaptation—that's to say, the way a nineteenth-century actor-manager might have done it. Either that, or he's as bad an actor as his critics have maintained.

Next comes *Actor*, about an aging English "luvvie" (as Fleet Street calls practioners of the thespian arts) struggling to stay afloat. Berkoff performs the entire monologue while walking on the spot—treading water, expending huge amounts of energy getting nowhere, as fellow Equity members pass by to be met by Berkoff with the same greeting: "Hello, Richard. How are *you*? Working?" The plaintive one-word question distills the essence of the floundering actor's modified ambition: it's not important that I succeed, but that my friends don't succeed. Berkoff makes more of the average actor's failure than Bea Arthur does of her success.

But the corker is the closer, *Dog*, in which Berkoff plays both a knuckle-dragging beer-bellied skinhead in a Union Jack T-shirt and his foaming, snarling pit bull, Roy. They've had an evening at the pub: the yobbo had thirty-five pints and then threw up in the street: "Right skating rink, it was," though the dog didn't mind. "'E's not fussy."

The title gives a clue as to which of the two the author regards as the more evolved form of life. Berkoff, like Harold Pinter, grew up in Hackney, in East London. But Pinter, embraced by the arts establishment and married to an earl's daughter, venerates the masses. Berkoff loathes toffs, despises middle-class boys on the make, but is under no illusions about his own kind, their narrow obsessions—beer, curry, fags, violence—rendered in loving, Hogarthian detail. He was always anti-Maggie, but, unlike the house-trained chaps at the RSC and the National, his indictments of "Thatcher's Britain" have some real bite. With hindsight, Mrs. Thatcher's crucial error was to import American theories of economic liberty without the concomitant theories of civic responsibility and decentralization. The result is modern England, where relatively materially well-off people live in areas of colossal public squalor. Hackney is ugly, dirty, lawless. But what can you do? You can't run for School Board or City Council. The former has no equivalent, the latter has no power. So you get pissed, throw up, and get a dog as violent as you. Like everything Berkoff does, his vision of London's squalor is exaggerated. But at its heart is a fundamental truth about contemporary England. And, given that no other prominent dramatist of the Eighties seemed to see it, I'd say if we're handing out awards for "courage" and "fearlessness" then let's give 'em to Steven Berkoff, if only for the reason that he'd dismiss Bea Arthur as a bourgeois poseur.

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Art

Father & daughter at the Met

by Karen Wilkin

These days, anyone with even a passing interest in old master art knows about Artemisia Gentileschi (1593–1652), one of the very few women to become, against all odds, an acclaimed painter at a time when making art was an exclusively male province. Born in 1593 and motherless from the age of twelve, she grew up in the heart of Rome, in the studio of her painter father Orazio (1563–1639), apparently taught by him and displaying precocious talent. When she was seventeen, one of her father's friends and collaborators, a painter specializing in landscape and illusionistic architecture, raped her, promised to marry her, but conveniently neglected to tell her until much later that his supposedly dead wife was, in fact, very much alive. A complicated, protracted, and now much-discussed trial followed, replete with false witnesses, counter-accusations, and even torture. The rapist was found guilty and sentenced to exile, although he didn't bother to leave Rome until he was convicted of some other offense a few years later. To save face, Artemisia was married off to an undistinguished Florentine painter, and she soon moved to Florence.

Astonishingly, she went on to establish herself as an artist to be reckoned with, gaining the support of the Medici as patrons and becoming the first female member of the Accademia del Disegno. She became part of the circle of the Medici court poet and a close friend of Galileo's—despite being virtually illiterate. Her success notwithstanding, Artemisia left Florence abruptly in 1620 and returned to Rome, where she also came to enjoy considerable private patronage. About a decade later, after a short stay in Venice, she settled in Naples, where she spent the rest of her life. When she died in 1652, she was known throughout Europe, in part, responsible art historians have pointed out, simply because of the outrageous novelty of being a woman artist, but still identified in the caption of a portrait engraving as a "celebrated painter . . . a marvel in the art of painting." It's true that Artemisia never received a single public commission during her entire career, and it has been suggested that it was her notorious history, as much as her ability, that encouraged her male patrons to commission the images of violence and seduction, the Judiths, Lucretias, and Susannas for which she remains best known. Yet the very fact that she was taken seriously as a painter in an age when women were thought to be incapable of mastering any profession must command respect, all the more so when you take into account the number of important male artists at work in her lifetime.

Artemisia's current reputation, unfortunately, is bound up with her history of victimhood and triumph over difficult circumstances, oppressive cultural norms, and all the rest of it—a tale ready-made for feminists of all stripes, with special appeal, it seems, for aspiring female artists and art historians. In the 1980s and 1990s, I could ex-

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pect at least three or four term papers on Artemisia out of any class of twenty-odd students allowed to choose their own topics. (Admittedly there were an equal number on Camille Claudel after the release of that film with Isabelle Adjani. Claudel, the complete victim, who was treated abominably by her mentor and sometime lover, Rodin, and committed to a mental institution by her poet brother, eventually became more popular among the gender-conscious than Artemisia, who was, after all, notably successful in her own day and "marginalized" only later, presumably because of the hegemony of dead white male scholars.)

Yet however poignant or inspiring Artemisia's biography may be, it is on her work that her place in history of art really depends, and if her story is familiar, her work is not. For many New Yorkers, I suspect, first-hand experience of her work is largely limited to the Metropolitan's peculiar *Esther Before Ahasuerus* (c. 1628–35), an awkward painting as notable for the unconvincing, mannered postures of its protagonists as it is for the bravura rendering their gorgeous costumes; on this side of the Atlantic, a trip to the Detroit Institute of Arts is obligatory to see what the painter was capable of at her best: the radiant *Judith And Her Maidservant* (c. 1625–27), a brutal but elegant painting as subtle and evocative as the Met's *Esther* is clumsy and rhetorical. The work of Artemisia's father, Orazio, whose approach profoundly influenced that of his remarkable daughter and who was at least as famous—or more so—in his lifetime than she was in hers, is today even less familiar, unless, in this country, you know intimately the collections of the National Gallery, Washington, or the Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford.

This spring, however, it's possible to evaluate the work of both artists in the Metropolitan Museum's ambitious survey "Orazio and Artemisia Gentileschi: Father and Daughter Painters in Baroque Italy."[1] It's a show mercifully free of ideology, a matchless opportunity to weigh visual evidence through an impressive assembly of the two artists' widely dispersed pictures, brought together from often inaccessible public and private collections throughout Europe and the United States. The bare facts of Artemisia's life (and her father's) are outlined on the text panels, but their paintings are allowed to speak for themselves. Key works, problem pictures, and repeated images, now separated, are brought into proximity to permit direct comparisons. Specialists can scrutinize pictures variously assigned to Orazio or Artemisia (or sometimes to both as collaborators), debate the pros and cons of the attributions, and possibly even reach a consensus. The rest of us can accept the positions taken by the show's curators or test our eyes. But for anyone who pays attention, both the differences and similarities between these two closely linked painters will be illuminated and so will some fundamental ideas about seventeenth-century painting.

"Orazio and Artemisia Gentileschi" is an informative, intelligent, important show, a worthy addition to the ongoing series of studies of seventeenth-century painters—including Rubens, Rembrandt, Van Dyck, Vermeer, Velázquez, Ribera, de La Tour, and their colleagues—that have been mounted in the last decade or so by museums in New York, Boston, Washington, and Hartford, in collaboration with their European counterparts. (For Poussin, you had to go to London or Paris.) The exhibition raises interesting questions not only about the relationship of a particular father and daughter,

1 "Orazio and Artemisia Gentileschi: Father and Daughter Painters in Baroque Italy" opened at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, on February 14 and remains on view until May 12, 2002. The exhibition will also be seen at the Saint Louis Art Museum, Missouri (June 15–September 15, 2002). It was previously on view at the Museo del Palazzo di Venezia in Rome (October 15, 2001–January 6, 2002). A catalogue of the exhibition has been published by The Metropolitan Museum of Art in association with Yale University Press (476 pages, $75).

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but also about the persistent influence of Caravaggio, the nature of originality, and even—in connection with several problematic pictures, attributed diversely to both father and daughter—about the nature of male and female approaches to the female nude. Yet anyone who expects this thoughtful, scholarly examination of the work of the Gentileschi to be as exhilarating as the National Gallery's "Georges de La Tour and His World," about five years ago, or the Metropolitan's Velázquez and Ribera shows of the early 1990s, will be disappointed.

Why? Because, despite the show's many virtues, neither the father's nor the daughter's work consistently reaches the highest level set by their more distinguished colleagues. While there are occasional first-rate paintings by both artists in the exhibition at the Metropolitan, and many others that, if not quite as satisfying, still reward attention, as a whole this unusually large gathering of the work of the Gentilischi reinforces a point made almost as an afterthought in one of the show's wall texts: that seventeenth-century artists were, essentially, makers of marketable products for specific patrons. A few luminaries—Rubens, for instance, or Bernini or Caravaggio, or Rembrandt at the peak of his fame—produced haute couture art for clients discriminating and affluent enough to pay top prices, sometimes making more than one example of an especially admired image. For the next level of clients, there were images almost identical to the haute couture versions, designed by the master, yet executed not by his own hand but by the members of his studio, under his supervision. For still other patrons, there were works to be commissioned from accomplished but less distinguished artists—painters like Orazio or Artemisia Gentileschi—who were fully conversant with the latest styles and not only able to adapt them convincingly, but also, on occasion, to interpret couture modes with originality. Like the couture painters, the artists of this second tier also made multiple versions of works and subjects for which there was particular demand. (Such repetitions within the work of Orazio and Artemisia, in fact, form a kind of subtext of the current exhibition, along even more complex issues of the connections between related treatments of similar subjects by father and daughter, and both painters' relationship with the work of their contemporaries.)

The first half of the exhibition is dedicated to Orazio, introduced by the kind of picture that first won him a modest reputation by the time he was in his late thirties (and Artemisia was a toddler): a so-so half-length Madonna and child with a couple of saints jammed into what little space is left behind them, from about 1597-1600. It's an unexceptional late mannerist image as notable for its problematic space, rather stiff drawing, and fairly uninspired color as it is for any other quality. The other pictures by Orazio in the first gallery of the Met's installation were painted only a few years later—in the first years of the seventeenth century—yet while they manifest similar problems, they also have new solidity and conviction, a new subtlety of dark and light, and a new sense of both the dramatic and the naturalistic. That is, they seem more Caravaggesque, which makes perfect sense when you remember that the brilliant Lombard's first public commission, the Saint Matthew cycle in San Luigi dei Francesi, was unveiled in 1600. The dazzling blend of theatricality and realism in these three stunning canvases—the central "portrait" of the evangelist-apostle-saint at work on his gospel, the luminous calling of Matthew, and the shattering image of his martyrdom—presented a new conception of what painting could be. Events from the New Testament seemed as fiercely immediate as something happening down the street, simply (it appeared) because the painter had scrupulously observed actuality and intensified his findings by means of dramatic lighting. Years after Caravaggio's early death, younger artists throughout Europe continued to succumb to the powerful influence of his combination of brutal naturalism with what must now be called a cinematic sense of staging, attempting to reprise his ability to

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dramatize with shafts of light and to create mood and character by contrasting aged skin with opulent silk, overripe fruit with coarse wool, appetizing flesh with feathers or armor or crumpled linen. Orazio, who was right there in Rome at the start of Caravaggio's public career, successfully turned himself into an entirely different painter than he had been before he encountered the fresh new ideas posited by the paintings in San Luigi dei Francesi. And he not only strove to emulate in his work the things he admired in the notoriously obstreperous northerner's paintings, but he also became part of his rather louche circle, joining him in his chronic misbehavior and siding with him in his periodic feuds with other artists.

Orazio's paintings at the Metropolitan make it plain that even though he was eight years Caravaggio's senior (the two painters were thirty-seven and twenty-nine when they met) the younger artist clearly pointed the way for the older one. They made plain, too, that whatever the other ramifications of their association, Orazio's art benefited greatly from his connection with the young innovator. He rarely achieved the wrenching drama or the immediacy of Caravaggio at his best, nor did he ever learn to dispose figures as logically and convincingly as his idol did, but Orazio's post-Caravaggio pictures are notably firm, expressive, and occasionally mysterious. Eventually, he developed an admirably personal, more lyrical version of Caravaggism, producing, especially during the late Teens and Twenties of the 1600s, pictures memorable for their light-filled, refined realism, their geometric compositions, and their delicacy of touch. But soon after his "conversion" Orazio was often most successful when he leaned most strongly on his mentor: when, for example, he zeroed in on his protagonists, making them fill an ambiguous darkened space, as Caravaggio often did. When he placed full-length figures in more ample settings, as he did in two of his most important commissions of the early 1600s, the large altarpieces of the circumcision of Christ and the vision of Saint Cecilia, the results are less impressive in their entirety than they are for individual figures or small groupings. (Well, except for the angel above Saint Cecilia, a Caraveggesque street kid fitted with borrowed wings who looks as though he posed propped up on his stomach on the floor, then had his image cut out and pasted to the upper part of the picture.) At one end of the spectrum of Orazio's ability in these years is a nifty *David Slaying Goliath* (c. 1607–09, National Gallery of Ireland, Dublin), which plays wonderful games with the disparate scales of the agile shepherd boy and the folded, foreshortened giant, and with the contrast of limb against limb, steel against flesh, and fabric against steel. At the opposite end is *Saint Michael And The Devil* (c. 1607–08, parish church of Santissimo Salvatore, Farnese, Viterbo), a silly picture, at once overly literal and mannered: two models tricked out in armor and batwings gesticulate histrionically in a slack composition like a reversed, unfolded version of *David Slaying Goliath*.

One of the most powerful and accomplished of Orazio's early works is a haunting *Judith and Her Maidservant* (c. 1608–09, Nasjonalgalleriet, Oslo), a strange, hermetic composition in which the two women face each other but turn their heads sharply to stare at something beyond the confines of the canvas. The viewer's gaze follows theirs, out of the picture, only to be drawn in again by the brutal spectacle of Holofernes's severed head, in a basket apparently borrowed from one of Caravaggio's still lifes, here bloodstained, but comfortably balanced on the maidservant's hip. The contrast between the terribly dead, livid countenance of Judith's victim and her creamy flesh, set off by the jewel-like, somber colors of the beautifully painted clothing and the delicate nuances of light and shadow, adds to the picture's fascination. So, of course, does the subject and the way in which Orazio chooses to interpret it. The diagonal of the maidservant's blue sleeve has obvious cognates with the diagonal arms of Judith in Caravaggio's celebrated version of

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the story, now in the Palazzo Barberini, Rome, but Orazio's compressed staging of the calm aftermath of action could not be more different from Caravaggio's frieze-like, stop-time depiction of a culminating moment of hideous violence. Orazio's women are still and passive; the sword, half-hidden, dangles uselessly from Judith's hand. Caravaggio's heroine saws away at the throat of the agonized Holofernes, downstage right.

A later version of the same motif by Orazio (c. 1621–24, Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford) points to the evolution of the relationship between mentor and disciple. In this *Judith and Her Maidservant with the Head of Holofernes*, the two women, now arranged in a tidy triangle, gaze in opposite directions, as if they had been forced to pose holding the severed head that occupies the center of the picture, but prefered to ignore it. Perhaps not surprisingly, since it was painted about fifteen years after Caravaggio's death, the picture seems less an evocation of Caravaggism than a conventional "academic" exercise of the period. Things get more interesting when you reach the sections of the show devoted to Artemisia's interpretations of *Judith Slaying Holofernes* (1612–13, Museo di Capodimonte, Naples and c. 1620, Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence), both deeply indebted to Caravaggio's horrific example and as fierce and deliberately disturbing as Orazio's versions are calm and contemplative. Artemisia closely follows Caravaggio's lead, conceptually and formally, in the gruesome moment depicted, the graphic violence of Judith's pose and Holofernes's struggle, and the brooding chiaroscuro, but she even ups the ante by having the maidservant, a grim onlooker in Caravaggio's picture, take an active part in holding down the protesting victim. Her Judith, modestly covered in the Barberini painting, exposes a good deal of décolletage, as if to remind viewers that the Assyrian general's violent death was preceded by a seduction. You wonder whether this exaggerated homage to Caravaggio was a response to demand or a deliberate strategy on Artemisia's part either to associate herself with her father's Caravaggesque work or to differentiate herself from his more lyrical approach of the time (if the dates posited by the organizers of the show at the Met are accurate). But before you can savor the ironic possibilities of these various explanations, you must take into account yet another *Judith and Her Maidservant* by Artemesia (c. 1618–19, Palazzo Pitti, Florence). Here her model seems to have been not Caravaggio but Orazio's treatment of the theme a decade earlier—the Oslo picture with the head in a basket balanced on the maid's hip and the turned heads. (For the debates about dating and questions about whether Artemisia had anything to do with this painting, see the exhibition's excellent catalogue.) In the Palazzo Pitti version, the two women have been brought closer together than in Orazio's painting. Huddled in a dark, undefined space, they seem tense, agitated; the turning of their heads seems ominous, like an animal's nervous response to an alarm. This uneasy mood is heightened by the bleached palette of pale ivories, creams, and dull gold, but the clincher is Judith's pose; instead of holding the sword at arm's length, disassociating herself from it, as she does in Orazio's picture, she swings it to her shoulder, ready for more action. Scrupulously observed details, like the lacing on the maidservant's dress, the knot of her kerchief, or the tendrils of Judith's hair, provide a sense of the ordinary as relief from the implied horror of the subject.

About 1625–27, this apparently endlessly fertile theme elicited another outstanding picture from Artemisia: Detroit's *Judith and Her Maidservant* is a splendid, eminently Caravaggesque painting, with deep pools of shadow, eerie candlelight, and eloquently enchained gestures, from the rhythmic cascade of Judith's upraised, backlit arm to her clearly illuminated sword arm to the outstretched arms of the servant (I'll spare you the feminist orthodoxies about why she responded to the motif). Judith's profile is brilliantly lit, but her face is deeply

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shadowed, making the forward thrust of her gesture more urgent, as though she were leaning out of darkness into light. Again, the two women seem startled by whatever has drawn their attention beyond the limits of the canvas. The crouching maidservant's pose, curiously, reprises both Judith's outstretched arms in Artemisia's earlier, gory renderings of Holofernes's decapitation and her source, Caravaggio's ferocious dramatization of the motif, although in the Detroit picture the gesture is domesticated, divorced from violence—until you notice that she is wrapping a severed head.

Pictures such as these, by both father and daughter, set a standard throughout the show that isn't always met, mostly because the two painters seem to have made enormous efforts to keep up with the most current modes of the moment. It's distressing to watch Orazio back away from the strengths of his most original and achieved paintings in what seems to have been an effort to align himself with the "next big thing." His peripatetic history, however, may help to explain, at least partially, his frequent changes of approach. After coming to Rome from his native Tuscany, in about 1576, when he was barely into his teens, he worked principally there, with excursions to the Marches, until 1621, when he moved to Genoa, at the invitation of one of the wealthy maritime city's aristocrats. In 1624, he was invited to the court of Marie de Medici, in Paris, to work on decorations for the Palais de Luxembourg. Two years later, he moved to London, where he lived until his death in 1639, in the employ of Charles I's favorite, the Duke of Buckingham. These peregrinations are reflected in the selections of Orazio's later work at the Metropolitan, which suggest that he attempted to assimilate whatever was most in vogue at the time, wherever he happened to be. In some pictures, the tender realism of his later Roman style appears to have been tempered by the chilly, heroic classicism of the French academicians, while the British paintings nod at Van Dyck. But Orazio achieved neither the icy grandeur of the French nor the virtuosity and decorative skill of Van Dyck, so that, despite the wall texts' giving him credit for his openness to new developments in painting, there is no avoiding the conclusion that his post-Roman work became increasingly generalized and bland in comparison to his earlier efforts, especially in relation to his solidly composed, delicately painted "sun-lit" Caravaggesque pictures of the late Teens and Twenties. Perhaps the abrasive, challenging presence of Caravaggio—either in person or in the form of his unignorable work—was required to bring out the best in Orazio. Artemisia's later work gives evidence of a similar falling off, especially after her move to Naples in about 1629 or 1630. Her section of the show, like Orazio's, also ends with the proverbial whimper and evidence of a struggle to stay in fashion. (Fashion turns out to be an operative word in another sense, since no matter how banal the composition, no matter how predictable the conception, both artists almost always deliver spectacular renderings of fabric and details of costume.) Yet if neither father nor daughter sustained his (or her) highest level of their best work throughout the entire trajectory of their careers, the exhibition includes enough of their strongest pictures to make "Orazio and Artemesia Gentileschi" an exhibition not to be missed—for aesthetic pleasure alone, quite apart from the absorbing questions it raises.

These questions are extensively probed by the exhibition catalogue, a wonderful collection of essays and entries by the Metropolitan's Keith Christiansen, one of the curators of the show, and a distinguished roster of international Gentileschi scholars. The result is a wide-ranging examination of all aspects of the lives and work of the two painters, from dissections of their responses to the art of the various regions where they lived and worked, to enlightening discussions on social attitudes of the period, all painstakingly pieced together from the sometimes sparse, sometimes oblique extant documentation, fleshed out with inspired

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hypotheses. The essay "Artemisia in Her Father's House" by Patrizia Cavazzini, for example, is a broad, informative study of her early training, her early work and its reception, her father's friendships, her rape, its implications, and how such an event was regarded at the time—all in all, a fine summation of early seventeenth-century mores, enriched by the inclusion of the surviving transcripts of the trial among the catalogue's appendices. Other plusses: good color reproductions and abundant comparative images, which are especially welcome in light of both Orazio's and Artemisia's dependence on suggestions from the work of their contemporaries. Oddly, many less than riveting pictures look stronger reproduced in the catalogue than they do in the flesh. It may be that the luxuriously thick, coated paper makes even rather dull pictures look more sumptuous, while the inevitable reduction in size required for reproduction solves problems of scale and, sometimes, problems of composition. It's puzzling, though, since I associate this phenomenon with very recent art, which is often *designed* to look better in the media than in reality. I understand, alas, the cynical grasp of marketing that inspires such calculations among present-day practitioners, but why should it be true of the Gentileschi? Time to go back and look at the real thing again.

Exhibition note

"The Artist's Hand: Willem de Kooning Drawings, 1937 to 1954," at Mitchell-Innes & Nash, New York January 17–March 2, 2002

Willem de Kooning once pronounced that "Style is a fraud," adding, "I always felt the Greeks were hiding behind their columns." Confronted with the restless array of styles found in the twenty-seven drawings on view in this significant and wholly engrossing show, one was tempted to swivel one's head in disbelief. How could someone who approached drawing from so many angles, and whose pencil expressed so many moods, deny style? The answer, of course, was in the evidence before one's eye. A limpid commercial drawing, abstract interiors, calm linear portraits, frenzied semi-abstract figures: what connects all of them is not a retreat from style but an unwillingness to settle for a particular way of looking. The undulant, parabolic curves that in *Untitled (Mechanical Interior)* from the late thirties connect circles and spoked wheels also describe the swell of hips in his drawings of women in the fifties, and, one recalls, those same curves float free of description in his late abstract canvases of the eighties. The style in all these works varies, but the identity of the man who made them remains as identifiable and constant as his signature. In a lecture, de Kooning once confessed that "The attitude that nature is chaotic and that the artist puts order into it is a very absurd point of view, I think. All that we can hope for is to put some order into ourselves." Style may be a fraud; it was by rummaging through *styles* that he sought his sense of order.

What one saw at Mitchell-Innes & Nash is not the Matissean pursuit of order-as-quietude but a relentless search for a certain visual honesty. The story these drawings tell is extraordinary—a tale of rangy disquietude and consistent mastery. It touches on many of the artistic movements of the first half of the century, from Cubism to Abstract Expressionism, yet is confined by none of them. Amusement in the title *Study for Father, Mother, Brother and Sister* or *Study for Father, Mother, Sister and Brother* (c. 1937–39), a work in pencil on paper, registers also in the humorous, leech-like form seated on a straight-backed chair and in the upside-down shadow cast against the room's back wall. The use of biomorphic stand-ins for figures, the attention to illusory depth, and the stage-like quality of the room in the drawing all indicate its debt to Surrealism, and I, for one, am grateful that de Kooning plucked from that movement its whimsical tone rather than its more serious, though less creditable, pretensions. However, even in

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what amounts to a pastiche of Surrealism, one finds the artist's enduring obsessions. Hovering in the upper left-hand corner is a shape whose distinctive hill-and-valley curve reappears as a haunch in *Woman* (c. 1942), in the more abstract *Untitled (Reclining Woman)* (c. 1945), and in a number of other later drawings. In the abstract *Untitled* (c. 1942), a study of shaded areas of negative space holds together overlapping and contiguous planes in a manner that alludes to Cubism and collage without ever quite tipping its stylistic hand in either direction.

As might be expected from de Kooning, it is the figure drawings that tell the most urgent and anxious story, one in which the imagery becomes increasingly obscured and frenetic or violent. For a *Harper's Bazaar* commission, he depicted his wife, Elaine, wearing a number of hairstyles, with traditional modeling and minute attention to individual strands of hair. And, like the coifs, no line or mark goes astray. *Seated Woman* (1941) attends to the soft volumes of the woman's body and clothes, the inclination of her head with its fuzzy halo of hair, and the awkward pose of her raised left hand, while *Study for "Seated Man" (Self-Portrait)* (c. 1938–39) takes as its focus the artist's intricately whorled right ear and the suggestion of tense musculature in the neck and jaw. A line drawing, *Portrait of a Man (Harold Rosenberg)* (c. 1938), aligns along a central, vertical axis the nose, the chin, the bunched shirt at Rosenberg's waist, and the crimped cloth at his crotch. Amusingly, his asymmetrical eyes, which subtly evince Picasso's influence, rhyme with the foreshortened false digit of a cigar stub stuck between two fingers in his left hand. Linear perspective also becomes a theme of the untitled study of dead or dying men from 1941. The figure in the foreground, with arms splayed and foreshortened, inevitably calls to mind Paolo Uccello's famous fallen soldier. Here de Kooning exploits the contrast between the highly modeled figures at the drawing's center and the schematic, linear, and ghostlike figures on the right edge.

Still, by the mid-forties, traditional presentations of the figure, especially the female figure, no longer satisfied de Kooning. With its yellow wash, orange and green pastel, and the figure of the woman reduced to an arched leg abutting a bent, bulging torso, *Untitled (Reclining Woman)* resembles nothing so much as *Untitled (Abstraction in golds and yellows)* (c. 1946), an entirely abstract, linear composition in oil, crayon, and pencil. Fittingly, the show ended with *Woman* (c. 1952–53), which roils with tortured energy. The face, again mimicking Picasso's compressed planar asymmetries, and severely squared-off shoulders are defined on one side by a mandorla of blue pastel; the rest of the body—excepting the bullet-shaped breasts, one bent knee, and three fingers on the left hand—seems ravished by erasures, slashing pencil marks, rubbings, and harsh crosshatched shadings. Looking closer, one can see that de Kooning further attacked this figure by jabbing at the face and groin with either his pencil point or a thumbtack.

Though they appear increasingly entropic, the drawings do not tell the story of a classically trained artist who progressively threw off the constraints of formal education. He never employed his pencil to disavow the past, though he frequently used it to delineate his own stylistic future. Perhaps more so than any of this century's estimable draughtsmen—Matisse and Picasso, Balthus, Giacometti, even the German Expressionists—de Kooning used drawing as a primary means of searching for his own idiosyncratic order.

—*Daniel Kunitz*

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Music

New York chronicle

by Jay Nordlinger

Barbara Bonney, the celebrated American soprano, recently put out a new album, titled *While I Dream*. It contains Schumann's song-cycle *Dichterliebe* (*Poet's Love*) and a dozen songs of Liszt. The cover shows Bonney in a rich, ornate gown reclining on what appears to be a bed of satin. A thin, delicate necklace plays around her . . . forehead. Odd, but they didn't do this with Schumann-Heink.

Bonney, however, like that not-so-glamorous earlier singer, is a superb performer, as she proved in her recent recital at Carnegie Hall. The program consisted of much of the music from the new album, starting with *Dichterliebe*. At the piano was the British accompanist Malcolm Martineau (although the pianist heard on the recording is Antonio Pappano, who is best known as a conductor). The Bonney-Martineau recital did not take place in Carnegie's little Weill Recital Hall—perfect for a *Liederabend*—but in the main auditorium. What one loses in intimacy, one gains in revenue—and Bonney puts fannies in the seats. But a good lieder singer must create his own intimacy, even if his venue is Yankee Stadium. This, Bonney does.

It is a first-rate voice, governed by a first-rate technique. That voice is light and lyrical, but it has plenty of body. *Dichterliebe* requires everything a singer has, including great mental discipline and imagination. Bonney has clearly thought deeply about these songs, yet she presents them naturally. A lieder singer must walk a thin line: sing these songs too cerebrally, and you choke the music out of them; sing them too unreflectively, and you're just skimming the surface. Bonney gets it right. Her singing is inward—she is thinking to herself, and talking to herself—while at the same time communicating with the audience. This is no easy trick.

Martineau is a help. He is especially good at keeping the music moving forward, and he joins the singer in talking to us, the audience. He has those two vital accompanist's qualities: sensitivity and supportiveness. He is neither wimpily submissive nor overpowering.

It's true that, in a song like "Ich grolle nicht," one is used to a little more heft. Bonney doesn't have heft—but she makes up for it in other ways, having many musical and vocal tools. For example, she can deliver startling power in the top notes—this is not just a matter of "carrying" or "penetrating"; no, this is real power, volume. And her natural gifts shine through in songs like "Am leuchtenden Sommermorgen," which was almost unbearably wistful. "Aus alten Märchen winkt es" had a fresh, clean-scrubbed beauty (very Bonneyesque). In *Dichterliebe*, a singer must traverse a great expressive range, and Bonney never faltered.

I must say, I had never quite realized what a profoundly great work *Dichterliebe* is—and if a performance can leave you thinking and talking about the composer's achievement, that's not bad.

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Garrick Ohlsson is the American pianist some people think of as Polish: he has made a specialty of Chopin—tackling that composer's entire oeuvre—and he is said to be something of a hero, or adopted son, in Poland. At Carnegie Hall, he set out a Rachmaninoff-centered program, and a fascinating program it was—old-fashioned (which, from me, is no insult).

It began with one of Rachmaninoff's greatest transcriptions, his little suite from Bach's Violin Partita in E Major. Rachmaninoff—who wrote for himself, as well as posterity—relished playing this music, and so did many other pianists of his time, and after. But then rose up the back-to-nature gang—the "originalists," the primitivists—and anyone even *thinking* of playing or enjoying this transcription, or Busoni, was condemned as a philistine and heretic. Ohlsson is blessedly immune from such pressures.

His playing, however, was disappointing: it was indistinct, bland, and sloppy. There were many missed notes, which was surprising from such an accomplished technician. Also, it was overpedaled, adding to the impression of muddiness and sluggishness. A lack of clarity deprived these pieces of their sparkle and joy. This is a Rachmaninoff transcription, yes—but it's also Bach's E-major partita. Ohlsson's account was not Baroque enough, and it wasn't acceptable as Rachmaninoff, either.

Then came Mendelssohn's *Variations sérieuses*, in which Ohlsson was better, though still indifferent. The variations in his hands were rather blurry and overwrought, and the marvelous ending was without intensity and pleasure.

Closing the first half of the recital were two small works by the American composer John Adams (of *Death of Klinghoffer* fame, and infamy). The first of these pieces was *China Gates*, from 1977, and the second was *American Berserk*, written for Ohlsson and commissioned by Carnegie Hall (and receiving its world premiere). For both pieces, Ohlsson used sheet music, complete with page-turner. I have asked before: Why do they do this? Composers give works to performers, and the performers don't bother to memorize them, instead nodding to their page-turner. Don't the composers mind? The new Adams piece, for example, was only a few minutes long.

China Gates is a minimalist job, requiring legato and lull; Ohlsson played it rather choppily. The new piece—*American Berserk*—is well titled, raucous, and it reminded me very much of the *Four Occasional Pieces* of John Harbison, attractively recorded by the pianist Patricia Goodson. Ohlsson, sadly, did not afford the work an especially felicitous debut: it was rather undifferentiated, tossed off—just noisy. Adams, upon joining Ohlsson onstage, gave a little sarcastic bow to the American flag standing in the corner.

After intermission, Ohlsson did something exceedingly and impressively daring: or rather, he had already done so, in his programming. Of all the Rachmaninoff preludes in the world, he chose the two most popular (and, arguably, most hackneyed): the C-sharp minor and the G minor. This, like the program in its entirety, showed a remarkable freedom of thought. The C-sharp minor was, in fact, well played, in part because it was well weighted—solid and grand. The G minor was competent, but did not electrify or jolt as it might have.

Then came Rachmaninoff's famous transcription of the Scherzo from Mendelssohn's *Midsummer Night's Dream*. Ohlsson was still sluggish and inaccurate, simply lacking the fingers to play this piece as it should be played, which is to say, clearly, nimbly, and astonishingly. Evgeny Kissin had performed the piece in this hall a few months before; Ohlsson suffered badly from the comparison.

But wait: ending the printed program was Rachmaninoff's Sonata No. 2 in B-flat minor, and it was assured, authoritative, and magnificent. It was as though a different pianist had sat down at the piano. Ohlsson played with fire and heart, with understanding and elegance. Rarely does this work receive so inspired and polished a

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reading. Following that, Ohlsson's first encore was Rachmaninoff's G-sharp-minor prelude—exquisite, haunting.

Funny old world, then. A funny old profession, too. One of my truisms is that it always pays to show up at the concert hall or opera house: you never know what will happen. Sometimes a humble performer will rise to greatness; sometimes a great one will be laid low. There is a related truism: it pays to stay all the way through. Again, you never know what might transpire. Anyone leaving the Ohlsson recital before the sonata could never have believed that it would go so very well.

The young conductor Roberto Abbado has one of the most famous names in his business: he is the nephew of Claudio, who is just completing his tenure with the Berlin Philharmonic. Whether that name has been a burden or boon—or both—Roberto is enjoying a solid career, and he appeared in Carnegie Hall with the Philadelphia Orchestra, of which he is a regular guest.

They began with one of Prokofiev's most evocative and appealing works, the *Overture on Hebrew Themes*. Predictably, there was that unusual, and unusually beautiful, Philadelphia sound: even from a reduced orchestra. The performance, however, was dull—limp—for such a colorful and beguiling piece. It failed to "swing."

The soloist of the evening was a young and increasingly popular Russian violinist, Vadim Repin. He played the Tchaikovsky concerto, which, for such a staple and alleged bore, is not heard terribly often in the concert hall, at least in my experience. From his first notes, Repin showed what can only be called musical sense—unteachable and invaluable. In phrasing, dynamics, and temper, he knew what he was doing, instinctively. Either one is musical or one is not: and Repin is. As for his sound, it is warm and burnished—at times, viola-like. It is often not a clean or clear sound, however.

The opening Allegro was not without its problems. For one thing, coordination between soloist and orchestra was poor (and for this, Abbado was chiefly to blame). In addition, the conductor's dynamics came off as artificial and plotted—contrived—rather than natural or inevitable. In the slow movement, Repin's intonation was suspect, as he was consistently on the low side. The Philadelphia's famed woodwind section, however, shone. Finally, in the Allegro vivacissimo, Abbado and Repin had trouble establishing tempo—and the latter made some truly ugly sounds.

Yet Repin is undeniably an impressive young violinist—among many others—and it is gratifying to have him on the scene.

The second half of the program was devoted to the Brahms First Symphony. This is a work that the Philadelphians should be able to play virtually on autopilot—but Roberto Abbado still had plenty of chances to botch it. If I may return to that sound, the first movement was simply covered in it, enveloped by it, turned practically purple by it. Music-making is, of course, infinitely more than sound, but it has never hurt the Philadelphians that they have it. Abbado was unobtrusive, basically content to let these experienced musicians play.

As the performance unfolded, it was hard—hard for me—not to compare what Abbado was doing with what Christian Thielemann, the young German conductor, had done with the New York Philharmonic several weeks before. (Thielemann programmed Brahms One as well.) Abbado's reading did not have as many inspired and throat-grabbing moments—but neither did it have as many strained or failed ones. It was a steady, sort of standard reading, and none the worse for it.

The Philadelphia forces were never less than their elegant, lush, and tasteful selves: and yet there were passages—particularly in the last movement (aside from the "hymn")—in which one would have appreciated a bit of an edge, a bite, a growl. Everything was so rounded and loving, and this is not the entire story of the Brahms First.

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The Welsh bass-baritone Bryn Terfel is one of the most popular singers in the world, and for good reason: he is loaded with voice, musicality, and personality—of such things, singing stars are made. His Carnegie Hall recital was done with his regular accompanist, Malcolm Martineau, who had just been heard with Barbara Bonney.

A striking and varied program began with a Schubert set, led off by "An Schwager Kronos." Here Terfel was very big, indistinct, and a little bluff—a weakness of many low male singers. "Heidenröslein" revealed another weakness, one of long standing for Terfel: a refusal to sing a song relatively straight. This little piece was full of odd hesitations, as though someone were trying to type on a balky Olivetti. Slow songs—"Meeres Stille," for example—Terfel tends to sing very, very slowly. He has great faith in his ability to sustain such tempos. But I hope that one day he will deign to speed up a little: we, the listeners, sometimes lose the line—of both the music and the words—and we all know that he can breathe. "Erlkönig," which ended the set, was adequate, but hardly terrifying or mortifying, as it might be. It occurred to me that it's just possible that Terfel is too likable—forever likable—for such a song.

After the Schubert came a cycle that Terfel seems to have made a specialty: Vaughan Williams's *Songs of Travel* (using poems by Robert Louis Stevenson). The opening song, "The Vagabond," was strong and thrilling (and *The Vagabond* is the title of a Terfel album of English art songs, with Martineau). "The Roadside Fire" was surprisingly fast and rough, for such a dreamy, lyrical song. "Youth and Love"—with which Janet Baker used to break your heart—was sung beautifully, but not especially spiritually or philosophically. It actually bordered on the operatic and stentorian. And the closing "I Have Trod the Upward and the Downward Slope" was also rather big for such a gentle farewell: though, at the end, Terfel gave us a little head voice on a D—glorious.

It may be that this cycle, unabridged, is a bit long for the typical audience. But Terfel sings it exceptionally well and characteristically, as he must know. It is a particular pleasure to hear him sing in English, for he is a splendid singer in this, his native language. One of the Stevenson poems begins "Bright is the ring of words/ When the right man rings them"—which certainly applies.

Speaking of language, Terfel displayed excellent French in three Duparc songs, as well as sensitive and refined singing. The Shakespeare songs of Roger Quilter are not, in my view, so fine as the Shakespeare songs of Gerald Finzi (which Terfel, along with every other British singer, also sings), but our bass-baritone handled them nicely.

Truly powerful was his presentation of three of the "Old American Songs" arranged by Aaron Copland. (These are the songs once associated with William Warfield, then most closely with Marilyn Horne, who sang them—it would not be too much to say—definitively.) "The Little Horses" was gorgeous; "At the River" was spellbinding; and "Ching-A-Ring Chaw" was full of character.

Closing the printed program was a new song-cycle by Jake Heggie, the young San Francisco-based composer who is writing for everyone and his brother, and whom everyone and his brother wants. Heggie is often called "conservative," by which critics mean that his music honors such quaint habits as harmony and melody. But whether conservative or not, this new work—*The Moon Is a Mirror* (with texts by Vachel Lindsay)—is sadly ordinary and forgettable.

Terfel, however, is not. Of his encores, the most stunning was a little, quiet Welsh song, with which the singer held the entire auditorium rapt. While in New York, his main activity was to star as Falstaff at the Metropolitan Opera. But he is a greatly satisfying recitalist, whose superstardom, we should say once more, is earned.

On the subject of singing stars: David Daniels has been a sensation for several years now, both because of his unusual category—countertenor—and because of his prowess in it. In the beginning, one might

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have thought that Daniels was something of a fad—or the dominant figure in a fad—but he has shown staying power. This is a power built on musicianship, his rare instrument aside. Daniels, a South Carolinian, was the marquee performer in a recent series of New York Philharmonic concerts, led by the English conductor Paul Daniel. (This made for a slightly confusing program and evening: Daniels was the countertenor; Daniel was on the podium.)

First, however, came a piece for harp and orchestra, Debussy's *Danse sacrée et danse profane*, one of that composer's most engaging works. Orchestras enjoy programming it, and harpists, naturally, don't complain. This concert's soloist was probably the best-known harpist in the world, if such a statement is not too ridiculous: that was Nancy Allen, for many years a full-time soloist, now principal harpist with the Philharmonic (an atypical career course). Her playing was lovely, deft, and noble, like the work itself.

With David Daniels, the first thing to assimilate is the shock of that voice: that womanly sound coming from a man, though a sound containing virility. Normally, Daniels, like other countertenors, can be found singing Baroque opera, in particular Handel, where the male alto is in greatest demand. Daniels has made a great impression in *Giulio Cesare* and other operas around the world. His Handel recordings are among the finest on offer.

With the Philharmonic, however, he sang two famous sets of French songs, *Les Nuits d'été* of Berlioz and *Cinq mélodies populaires grecques* of Ravel. Here Daniels was perhaps making a statement, saying, "I, like other singers, can sing anything, and I want the entire repertory available to me" (and no repertory is vaster than that for voice). He made his case, too. The Berlioz was thoroughly convincing, with Daniels almost always producing a beautiful line. Everything was tastefully phrased, and the singer's French was superb. He is one of those who exude pleasure in singing.

He owns, as the world agrees, a fabulous instrument, and it is quite expressive. Expressive of what? Anything, really, but notably of longing, resignation, and quivering excitement. Only in "L'Ile inconnue" did this instrument seem underpowered, with Daniels scanting some of the rapture and swell of the piece.

To the Ravel songs, Daniels was especially well suited. He displayed in them color, exoticism, and a kind of markedness—musical markedness. I might point out that the Philharmonic's program and notes defensively and somewhat risibly translated the beloved closing song—"Tout gai!"—"Everything is Joyous!"

The evening's symphony was the Beethoven Second, a brilliant work (a Beethoven symphony, after all). Paul Daniel is the music director of the English National Opera, and obviously a man of experience and competence. He is tall and thin, and he is given to somewhat abrupt and jerky movements. His gestures are almost always extremely emphatic—and yet this did not seem to bring orchestral precision or cohesion. The Beethoven, in addition to being pedestrian, was rather loose, careless. The Larghetto did not have its ethereality, and in some bars it was clumsy and thumping. The Scherzo had energy—but, overall, the performance did not rise above the routine.

Let it be said, however, that the horn playing was spectacular, with principal Philip Myers firing on all cylinders. And the countertenor and harpist had done well. From a couple of hours in a concert hall, that is probably more than one has a right to expect.

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An operatic baggy monster

by Patrick J. Smith

Epic opera is a very rare breed in a large kennel, and its successes are even rarer in number. "Grand Opera," that nineteenth-century invention that updated (without even knowing it) the spectacle opera of the seventeenth century, is not epic opera, because for all its vocal and scenic extravagance it is still confined to the operatic stage. Epic opera, however, seeks to travel beyond, and it is not surprising that most operas of this limited genre are based on epic literary works. Even the overreaching failures, like August Bungert's operatic trilogy on the Homeric poems, are connected to literature, as are the most celebrated epics of Berlioz (Virgil) and Wagner.

There is a good case to be made that the gap-toothed, antic fable created by Emanuel Schikaneder for Mozart's genius—*Die Zauberflöte*—is some sort of epic, and certainly its journey of discovery from youth to maturity, from naïveté to wisdom and understanding, has about it a whiff of the epic. Enlightenment, in its epic sense, is the goal.

So it is with Tolstoy's "baggy monster," the epic novel *War and Peace*. When all the stucco, panelling, and decoration have been stripped away, we are left with a tale that begins with two people, Natasha Rostova and Pierre Bezukhov—both "wet behind the ears"—and ends with what Tolstoy saw as an ideal couple, annealed through the vicissitudes of their separate lives. The "fire and water" trials of Schikaneder are here, as are the much more immediate cruelties of the Napoleonic invasion of Russia in 1812. But even before the invasion begins, both central figures have been tested: Pierre through his disastrous marriage with Hélène; Natasha through her liaison with the cad Anatol Kuragin, short-lived and innocent though it was, which destroys her betrothal to Andrei Bolkonsky.

The time of each characters's epiphany, however, comes with the Napoleonic invasion. Pierre, in his ceaseless quest for enlightenment, is led to the battlefield of Borodino and more crucially to an occupied Moscow, where he witnesses the atrocity of war firsthand and resolves to kill Napoleon. He narrowly averts death by firing squad (a parallel with Dostoevsky's life), is conveyed westward in a group of prisoners, and learns humane understanding in the company of a true Russian "soul," Platon Karatayev.

Natasha, for her own part, is traversing the same path, if in a different way. Her rekindled love for Andrei, wounded and dying, deepens and enriches her growing maturity as a woman and human being, but her crucial experience comes earlier in the novel, when she witnesses the sufferings of the wounded in Moscow. She insists that her family leave all of its material goods in order to transport as many of the wounded as possible to safety. Since the Rostovs are impoverished nobility, this sacrifice is doubly hard for the family, yet Natasha's will and resolve overcome all objections. Her time as nurse to the gangrene-polluted

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Andrei only completes her trials, leaving her ready to see Pierre as an equal in maturity and understanding, thus, as with Odysseus and Penelope, bringing the epic to a proper close.

It is this baggy monster that Sergei Prokofiev and his common-law second wife, Mira, transformed into epic opera. Hitler's invasion of Russia in 1941, and its obvious parallels with that of Napoleon's, gave impetus to the idea, and many of the opera's thirteen scenes were composed by the end of World War II.

At that time the difficulties began. Most of the completed scenes were those of "peace"—the years of the Peace of Tilsit between Napoleon and Tsar Alexander I (the opera accurately should be titled "Peace and War")—and involve, primarily, Natasha and her amorous tribulations. War brought in Mother Russia, and in 1945 the Soviet Union, bled white by Hitler's onslaught, wanted only patriotic musical glorification in *War and Peace*. Tolstoy may have argued against the "great man" theory of history in his novel, but the faceless commissars of culture saw the hero Field Marshal Kutuzov as a Stalin-substitute and wanted him glorified. Prokofiev complied, and the "war" scenes became replete with empty musical bombast, a "big tune" repeated and repeated with Father Kutuzov on hand to grant us another homily. Even so, poor Prokofiev never saw his opera performed in its entirety, since the commissars did not dare approve a work that might not, even then, be celebratory enough for Stalin.

In truth, the Prokofievs did a less than perfect job in reducing Tolstoy to the operatic stage. Much gets sacrificed correctly—Andrei's first marriage and his child, Natasha's brother—though what remains puts more people on stage than any other opera I know (the three-sheet outside the Met resorts to small type to list the named cast). Yet the work is broken-backed, with the first scenes small, peace-oriented, and the final "war" scenes endlessly extrapolated.

And the *Zauberflöte* progress towards enlightenment is subverted. The main pair of *War and Peace* is Natasha and Andrei, onstage through the first scene and in a lengthy duet of mortality (vide *La Traviata*, *La Bohème*, *Faust*) in the penultimate scene. Pierre indeed has a major role, but he is on the periphery—we see him in the convoy of prisoners in the snow; we see the death of Platon and Pierre's rescue by the Cossacks. He learns of his wife's (convenient) death and of Andrei's, but the end of the opera is reserved for the Triumph of the Russian People and another encomium to dear old half-blind Kutuzov, with the "big tune" in prominence and Uncle Joe smiling benignly from the wings.

I suppose it would have been difficult to construct the work on a Natasha-Pierre basis, but, after all, that was the task undertaken. As it is, we are given scenes by Tolstoy in an opera heavily edited by the Prokofievs and others.

I also wish that the music were stronger. I have suggested elsewhere that Prokofiev was essentially a "miniaturist" composer—more comfortable with smaller forms—and though that might be an extreme position there is little doubt that the epic was not in his compositional make-up. There is a lovely, wispy waltz, which reappears often to suggest the Natasha-Andrei relationship, and some excellent individual moments scattered throughout, but the opera never seems more than a collection of them, and things become grievously damaged by over-elaboration in the second part.

The first Metropolitan Opera performance of the work (which I saw February 14, the opening night, with its now infamous tumble of a French soldier into the orchestra pit) is in fact a travelling show, seen already in London and Milan as a co-production with the Mariinsky Theatre of Saint Petersburg. The settings (by George Tsypin) are minimal and suggestive rather than literal, and though this does give a sense of the epic, the closed-in feeling that certain scenes (notably the death of Andrei) should have is sacrificed. I suspect that set designers aim for the timeless with these

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vast spaces, but the nineteenth-century masters of stage setting (such as Eugène Scribe) knew the greater dramatic power of an alternation of open and closed scenic forms.

The direction, by Andrei Konchalovsky, was stolidly effective—more successful in the intimate "peace" scenes than in the "war" ones, where he tended to have people running about the stage in repeated herds (the French flag stage right to left, again and again).

Both Francesca Zambello and (much, much earlier) Sarah Caldwell had more imaginative solutions to the problems of the piece, but at least there was a panoply to the effort—a sense of New York's Hippodrome revisited—and I'm told that the regimental flags were correct.

The cast could scarcely have been better, from the strength of the small roles to that of the principals. Anna Netrebko is Natasha to the life, from her bird-like immaturity through her petulant fury at being denied Kuragin to her serenely confident handling of Andrei's death. It is a masterful performance, gorgeously sung—I hope to hear her in other roles. Dmitri Hvorostovsky is today one of a handful of superior lyric baritones and ideally suited for the heroic (but rather vain and self-important) Andrei. He and Netrebko's final scene were rightly the vocal centerpoint of the evening. Gegam Grigorian has honed his conception of Pierre over many performances, and he knows exactly how far to take the clumsy striving and the gaucheness of the character without having it become a negative caricature. By the end of the opera we realize his growth in understanding, so that, even without the closure Tolstoy provided, we can imagine it. Samuel Ramey's voice is no longer able to give Kutuzov the calm certainty it should have, but his presence does give the Field Marshal his authority.

The real field marshal, of course, was Valery Gergiev, who thrives on just this kind of spectacle Russian work, and, if you don't expect subtlety, his control of his large forces has a power and an epic thrust. In the big war scenes he almost persuades us that all the bombast is actually stirring patriotic outpourings.

As a valuable pendant to this historical portrait, a book on the 1812 campaign has recently been published that delineates it in watercolors.[1] Christian Wilhelm Faber du Faur was a major in the Württemberger adjunct to the Napoleonic forces, and he was one of the few who managed to return to his homeland after the catastrophe. (He later switched sides, despite having won a Legion of Honor, and ended his career fighting Napoleon.) During the campaign he made many sketches, most of them first published in the nineteenth century. This edition of ninety-two plates, with a translation of Faber du Faur's commentary, includes an introduction setting the scene and a map of the campaign.

We have become used to photographs of destruction and rapine in newspapers, magazines, and primarily on television, so that we are dulled to their impact. Yet these simple watercolors rendered with faithfulness have a powerful effect, if only because they are of an event in yesterday's bright colors and with its dashing presence. The almost serene confidence of the early plates, under the leafy canopy of trees, is contrasted to the grim scenes of winter as the demoralized army straggles back to safety. The immediacy of the campaign is brought back to life through these pictures, and the human-ness of those involved—not abstract forces of history but suffering people—is made everywhere evident. Pierre and Natasha's humanity was finely delineated by Tolstoy and well set forward by the Prokofievs, but Faber du Faur's views of what actually went on give their sufferings a concreteness and an imperishable sense of being there. It is a valuable record of a terrible time.

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1 *With Napoleon in Russia: The Illustrated Memoirs of Major Faber du Faur, 1812*, edited and translated by Jonathan North; Greenhill Books, 208 pages, $80.

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The media

Lessons in humility

by James Bowman

Five months—almost to the day—after September 11, the consensus on the terror attacks and their aftermath, The Story according to the media, suddenly changed. Of course, it was never on the cards that the original Story, of American heroes chasing down and eliminating fanatical foreign evil-doers, was going to last. President Bush may himself have hastened its demise with the phrase in his State of the Union address about the "axis of evil." However popular that description of some of the prime sponsors of terrorism or developers of terror-weapons may have been with the majority of Americans, it was decidedly not a hit with journalists—any more than it was with foreigners, to whose opinions journalists tend to be more sensitive than the rest of us. Neither journalists nor foreigners much liked Bush's foray into what the European Community's commissioner for foreign policy, Christopher Patten, described as "absolutism."

Then, too, there was at the time no major military campaign to occupy the attention of the army of journalists in Afghanistan and some dissatisfaction over the unfortunate fact that the most prominent of the fanatical foreign evil-doers, Osama bin Laden, had not yet been caught in spite of all the other successes against the al-Qaeda terror-network and their Taliban sponsors. But, for whatever reason, from February 10 at least until the fighting flared up again—and there were more American casualties—in early March, the media, led by those bellwethers of the journalistic flock, *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*, began to give a new emphasis to what they saw as the failings and shortcomings of the American military and diplomatic effort against terrorism.

"Uncertain Toll in the Fog of War: Civilian Deaths in Afghanistan," the *Times* that day headlined the story by Barry Bearak and others that told of a raid by American special forces on January 24 in which some innocent villagers in the Oruzgan province had been killed or arrested in the (apparently) mistaken belief that they were al-Qaeda members. Between fifteen and twenty-one had been killed and twenty-seven had been imprisoned for sixteen days. The next day, under the *Post*'s headline "Casualties of U.S. Miscalculations," an article by Doug Struck described how, on February 4, a remote-controlled Hellfire missile had blown up three Afghan scrap collectors in the equally mistaken belief that one of them—taller than the others and the object of some deference on their part—had been Osama bin Laden.

Struck even included with his report the thrilling detail that he himself had been stopped at gunpoint by American soldiers from getting close to the scene where the supposed scrap-collecting peasants had been blown to bits. "This is an ongoing military operation," he claimed the soldiers' commander had told him. "If you go further, you

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would be shot." Later, a Pentagon spokesman said that what the commander had actually said was it was dangerous up ahead and that, if Struck went on, he might be in danger of being shot—presumably by the enemy and not by his fellow countrymen—which Struck said was "an amazing lie." The following day, he reported it as a matter of fact, on the strength of an interview with a man claiming to be the uncle of one of the three victims, that they had indeed been innocent peasants in search of scrap.

> In this desperate land long raked by combat, the debris of battle quickly becomes a prize for the scavengers of war. That was why Jahan Gir and his two friends were at a bombed al Qaeda camp when they were hit last week by a U.S. missile, their relatives say.
>
> "They knew there were airstrikes there a few days before, so they knew they could find scrap metal," said Janat Khan, Gir's uncle. "They knew there was a risk, but they had to feed their families."

Struck attempted to give an enhanced importance to his claim by writing that

> The deaths of the three men Feb. 4 in Zhawar . . . might have passed as the unfortunate consequence of war had the Pentagon not claimed that the victims of the rocket attack were senior members of al Qaeda, and that one of them might have been the group's founder, Osama bin Laden.

When the Pentagon denied that the men were "scrap collectors" and insisted that they were up to no good, Howard Kurtz's media column ran with the witty headline: "Pentagon Gets Defensive." Could there be a scandal a-brewing? Please? Please?

Or, if not there perhaps, what about the allegations by some of the twenty-seven innocents imprisoned in Oruzgan that they had been beaten in captivity? A few reports noted that al-Qaeda had instructed its fighters to make, if captured, precisely such allegations as this, though for most the burden of proof that they had not been beaten rested with the U.S. government. The supposed beatings could thus be linked with the deaths of the supposed scrap collectors as a kind of corroboration of the new Story's doubtfulness about American tactics—this even though the Pentagon had acknowledged error in the one case but not in the other. Thus James Dao in *The New York Times*: "Questions about the attack [on the scrap collectors] come on the heels of assertions by officials in Oruzgan Province in central Afghanistan that American troops mistakenly attacked a group of anti-Taliban forces last month, killing at least 15 people and capturing 27." Ah, yes. Questions.

The underlying assumptions of the new Story were more congenial to the journalistic mentality than those of the old, according to which they were meant to be the cheerleaders to the American and allied military effort rather than the referees. Now they were again enabled to step off the field and adopt their favorite posture of "objectivity," studiously avoiding any questions which might have entailed commitment to winners or losers and concerning themselves only with those of how, so far as they could see it, the game was being played. But although the focus on civilian casualties was natural from an Afghan standpoint, it was unnatural from an American one. It got the proportions wrong, losing sight of the reasons why the war was being fought in the first place and the inevitability of hardship and danger for those among whose daily lives it was being fought.

Of course it is quite understandable that the reporters should get tired of the five months' focus on President Bush's "war against terrorism." The attention of their readers, too, must have wandered in the absence of any dramatic battles or troop movements, or the killing or capture of Osama bin Laden. But the journalist's first responsibility is not to the market, or to the attention span of his audience, but to the truth, and the truth here must be supposed to include that sense of proportionality that is sacrificed when the point of view shifts

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from American to Afghani for the sake of freshness and interest.

More important, perhaps, than the need for freshness was the need for a larger familiarity, for a context to contain The Story more familiar than that of Islamic fundamentalism and religious and national tensions in Central Asia. For the *Post*'s columnist Richard Cohen, the scandal was not the deaths of the Afghan peasants—mistakes do happen—but the claims of beatings by American soldiers and the fact that they had interfered with a journalist, Mr. Struck, in the lawful performance of his sacred duty to try to find out—well, anything that authority did not want him to find out. "It is one thing to bomb or attack on the basis of misinformation," wrote Cohen. "It is quite another thing to abuse prisoners captured as a result. It is also quite another thing to threaten the life of an American journalist." Determined to get all that he could out of his little quite-another-thing antithesis, he went on to raise the "specter" of My Lai and crushingly added that "it is one thing to fight the enemy. It is quite another to fight like him."

Let's see: My Lai is like al-Qaeda is like U.S. soldiers running riot—or at least giving signs that they *might*, once again, run riot by threatening a journalist, who is therefore like a helpless Vietnamese peasant. Somewhere in that thicket of analogy, the reader is likely to lose the thread. But the old reliable Frank Rich of *The New York Times* was in some ways even more hysterical than Cohen when he attempted to link the murder of Daniel Pearl, a reporter for *The Wall Street Journal*, by Muslim fanatics in Pakistan with the government's attempt to manage the news. "Not since the Nixon years," he wrote, "has an administration done as much to stymie reporters who specialize in the genre of investigative inquiry Mr. Pearl was pursuing when he was ambushed"—and he went on to mention the detention of poor Mr. Struck as "the most chilling example." Such examples are always chilling.

Cohen had already mentioned Vietnam and My Lai; now Rich was adding Nixon and Watergate. Together the two served as a reminder that, for those who came of age in the 1960s and who now dominate the journalistic culture, all foreign and defense stories tend to degrade to echoes of Vietnam—just as all political stories tend to degrade to echoes of Watergate and all social stories to echoes of the civil rights movement. Any history prior to McCarthyism (proto-Vietnam/Watergate) or the Holocaust (proto-civil rights) is irrelevant. Naturally, as journalism played a central role in all three of these nodal, transformative historical dramas, the heirs of the media heroes of yesteryear look for new opportunities of the same kind to become heroes themselves—like generals fighting (as generals are always said by the media to do) the last war.

Why shouldn't the mistaken deaths of Afghan peasants recall My Lai? Why shouldn't U.S. military policing of free-ranging war correspondents—whose purposes are proudly announced to be at variance with those of the American government and armed forces—suggest semi-official "enemies" lists of journalists? And if there were lots of reasons why they should not, what were these to the one big reason why they should, namely the justification of journalism's exalted ideas of its own importance? If you begin with the assumption that the truth is hidden and that it is the job of self-styled independent-minded journalists to dig it out, then any truths so hidden and so dug will naturally be privileged over the truths that are just lying around, waiting to be picked up. This is also why those who have learned how to use the art of leaking will always have the press as their instrument.

The other equally important way in which journalists see their services as being indispensable to us is in teasing out the nuance—the "shades of gray" to use the well-worn metaphor invariably employed on these occasions—between the absolute oppositions or "black-and-white" in terms of which politicians, generals and all those thought to be less clever than journalists are said to think. Thus Karen DeYoung lost no

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time in announcing on the front page of the *Post* on February 12 that

> The Afghan war, so easy to understand in its early, black and white days, when President Bush proclaimed that the world could be neatly divided into us and them, has lately taken on shades of gray.
>
> "To say the conditions in Afghanistan are confusing is an understatement," Pentagon spokeswoman Victoria Clarke said yesterday in a rare public display of frustration. "And it's impossible to say these people are on this side and these people are on the other side. People are on multiple sides, and they switch sides."
>
> The U.S. military, accustomed to being the undisputed good guys in this conflict, has grown defensive over reports of possible errors. . . . It is almost as if the administration fears that any admission of fallibility will cause overwhelming public support for the war at home to collapse—and for key partners abroad to withdraw their backing. . . .

The "multiple sides," like civilian deaths and injuries, suggested to many the infamous "quagmire" of Vietnam. More signs of just how "murky" war was said to be came with U.S. air action against one Afghan war-lord on behalf of—or so it was suspected by Michael Gordon of *The New York Times*—another. Though official spokesmen said that the bad war-lord was a former Taliban man who was smuggling al-Qaeda fighters out of Afghanistan while the good war-lord was working for the new Afghan government, "officials also acknowledge that the intelligence is unconfirmed and the exact composition of the enemy force still unclear."

The *Times*'s reporter seemed to think it would have been a considerable embarrassment to the U.S. if it were shown "that the Americans were intervening on the Afghan government's side in internal fighting in Afghanistan" since American government "officials" had made "an effort to rebut" any such allegations.

This story was linked to the mistaken attack story by Alan Sipress and Walter Pincus in *The Washington Post*, since:

> The costly raid on pro-American villagers in Hazar Qadam highlights the mounting danger that U.S. forces will be sucked into the simmering chaos of Afghanistan, with consequences not for the local population alone. The daunting security situation cited by Rumsfeld in his defense of U.S. conduct raises questions about the U.S. military's ability ultimately to extract itself as the campaign against al-Qaeda and Taliban fighters winds down.

Hence hints of the "quagmire" and "escalation" paradigms associated with Vietnam—if, that is, there was "a more extensive role for the U.S. military than first envisioned when American troops launched their hunt for Osama bin Laden and his followers." Sipress and Pincus go on to suggest that as many as 25,000 peacekeeping forces (there are now only 4,000 projected to be needed) might be required to keep order and suppress the warlords. "Escalation," anyone?

But the outcry for "shades of gray" was never louder than in response to President Bush's remarks about the "axis of evil." Such language recalled the Cold War for Mark Lilla and Robert F. Worth, both of whom appeared in *The New York Times*. Worth was particularly concerned:

> As President Bush toured Asia last week, some world leaders worried publicly that the war on terrorism was starting to look suspiciously like the last great American campaign—against Communism.
>
> It is hard to miss the cold war echoes. Once again America's allies are being told that the world is divided starkly into zones of good and evil, darkness and light, and that "the United States and only the United States can see this effort through to victory," as Vice President Dick Cheney told a gathering at the Council on Foreign Relations two weeks ago.

Worth was given considerable space to retrace the history of America's regrettable tendency to believe in evil in order to lay out, with an analogical abandon worthy of

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Richard Cohen, the precedents for this latest exercise in black-and-white thinking:

> The language Mr. Bush and others have used to describe Al Qaeda terrorists sometimes sounds as though it could have been written by Cotton Mather. Ever since the Puritans arrived in New England, civic and political leaders have often issued the same warning: sinister conspirators are spreading invisibly through the land, a cabal of evil and dangerous men who are bent on subverting this shining city on a hill. As Attorney General John Ashcroft put it recently: "A calculated, malignant, devastating evil has arisen in our world. Civilization cannot afford to ignore the wrongs that have been done."

The words are meant to be discredited by association with Cotton Mather and others—most notably and inevitably Joseph McCarthy—without their actual import ever being examined at all. True, Mr. Worth says that

> This is by no means to suggest that the terrorists who struck on Sept. 11, or who kidnapped and murdered *The Wall Street Journal* reporter Daniel Pearl, aren't evil, or that it is not necessary to say so. But when the nation's enemies are used as highly emotional political symbols, it becomes easy to lose touch with the reality of their acts and motives—and thus fail to better understand how to defeat or influence them. It is not hard to see in Mr. Ashcroft's language traces of what the historian Richard Hofstadter famously described as "the paranoid style in American politics."

Enough said! The important consideration about such language is not its truth or falsity but whether or not sophisticates like himself, or Richard Hofstadter, or others of his academic experts, look upon it with disdain. What else should matter to readers of *The New York Times*? It is the same approach they were encouraged to take to Communism. Yes, perhaps the Communists had done some very bad things, but it was a sign of national pathology—"the paranoid style"—to call attention to the fact, or to act forcefully upon it. Thus, inevitably,

> The McCarthy years in some ways were eerily similar to the present moment. For example, Samuel Stouffer, a Harvard sociologist doing research on attitudes toward Communism in the early 1950's, found a generalized anxiety that the country was under attack by unseen enemies bent on global domination.

Worth notes that "While all nations regard their causes as just, and all demonize their enemies, the combination of American might and its longstanding self-image as uniquely virtuous irritates even its allies"—as if "all nations" did not also, besides regarding their causes as just and their enemies as evil, irritate their allies, especially where the allies are much less powerful! "Why has that phrase, 'axis of evil,' crystallized so much anti-American sentiment around the world?" one of Worth's historical—and near-hysterical—experts, Professor John Dower of MIT, is quoted as saying: "Because the country sees itself as nothing but good and innocent, and that infuriates people." Yes, and he might have added that when countries really *are* good and innocent it infuriates them even more.

With wonderful irony, Worth concludes that, although "terrorism does present a real threat" and "cold-blooded killing presents a moral outrage" (handsome concessions!), "the history of American crusading, even against unmistakable evil, suggests that it can be more effective to start from a position of humility. Righteousness easily becomes self-righteousness, and it can be hard for crusaders to distinguish between the two." And there you have it: a lesson in humility from *The New York Times*. You won't find anyone "uniquely virtuous" or "good and innocent" in these pages, will you? Thank God for such a bulwark against the self-righteousness of George Bush!

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Books

Why the West wins wars

by Keith Windschuttle

Last October, when many liberal commentators in the media were predicting that America and its allies would end up in a quagmire in Afghanistan—"another Vietnam," they foretold—they would have been better advised to ponder the statistics compiled by Victor Davis Hanson about the previous conflict between a Western and an Islamic power.[1]

On January 17, 1991, Hanson reminds us in his book *Carnage and Culture*, a coalition of U.S. allies faced the veteran army of Iraq, which included 1.2 million ground troops, 3850 artillery pieces, 5800 tanks and 5100 armored vehicles. The Iraqis were entrenched on their native soil, easily supplied by highway from Baghdad, and equipped with the best military hardware, from poison gas to tanks and mines, that petrodollars could buy. Yet the Western allies defeated them in just four days, leaving tens of thousands of Iraqi soldiers dead for a loss of one hundred and fifty American servicemen and -women, most of whom were killed by friendly fire, random missile strikes, and other accidents. The media skeptics would also have been wise to consider the implications of another of Hanson's points. The Iraqi army was obliterated not far from the ancient battlefields of Cunaxa and Gaugamela, where Western forces—Xenophon's Ten Thousand in 401 B.C. and Alexander the Great in 331 B.C.—had also annihilated indigenous Asian armies.

Hanson's book is subtitled "Landmark Battles in the Rise of Western Power." It describes in considerable detail nine battles between 480 B.C. and 1968. It has a similar structure and is a worthy successor to Edward Creasy's enormously popular Victorian classic *The Fifteen Decisive Battles of the World* (1851). Hanson, however, has produced something far more important than Creasy. Although its narrative is based on a series of battles, *Carnage and Culture* is really an argument about the culture that defines what we call "the West." The book is an intervention into a debate that has been raging since the end of the Cold War over how we should conceive of the West and why it has achieved such dominance in the world.

Those historians who support the West usually provide explanations of its success in terms of a 2500-year-old tradition of reason and law, inherited from ancient Greece and Rome and tempered by the Judeo-Christian religion. The detractors of the West (mostly Westerners themselves, of course, or at least Western-educated) have argued that this account is a comforting myth, invented by European scholars after the Renaissance to give their culture a depth it does not deserve. They focus more on economic and military power. Europe, they claim, was a small and backward periphery on the fringes

1 *Carnage and Culture: Landmark Battles in the Rise of Western Power*, by Victor Davis Hanson; Doubleday, 320 pages, $29.95.

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of the Eurasian continent that only burst onto the world scene in the sixteenth century but which, by force of arms and the expropriation of wealth, came to dominate it by the nineteenth.

Hanson has taken this debate and transformed it completely by adding a whole new dimension that neither of the two sides had ever seriously considered. As a result, his book is not only one of the most important works of military history written in our time but also a study of Western civilization from a perspective that illuminates it more vividly than anything else produced in the past decade.

Previous military historians who have ventured onto the terrain of culture have taken a fairly narrow course. They have mainly focussed on the culture of fighting men themselves, either to explain the intense loyalty many soldiers demonstrate towards their comrades in battle or to account for some of the more bizarre forms of military behavior, such as the emperor worship of Japanese kamikaze pilots in World War II. Hanson's thesis, by contrast, is as broad as you can get. He argues that the very nature of Western military performance can be explained by Western civic culture.

Against those who claim that European military dominance only dates from the last five hundred years, Hanson says the main tenets of Western warfare were well established during classical antiquity. Since the fifth century B.C., Hanson writes, the West has had a culture of civic militarism in which people with a democratic stake in their country have been prepared to fight for it. On the field of battle, this civic culture has produced an unmatched combination of group discipline and inventive decision-making. Western soldiers have been prepared to fight to the death in great decisive battles that have annihilated their opponents. Individual soldiers have known that their military service was governed by a legal regime that applied as equally to their superiors as to themselves. Coupled with a similarly long-standing tradition of the dissemination and proliferation of knowledge that culminated in the scientific and industrial revolutions, Western militarism has been supplied with better armaments and more innovative military technology than any of its opponents. Moreover, market-based economies have meant that the needs of Western armies for ordinance and supplies could be more rapidly and cheaply produced than by the command economies of any of its rivals.

The West has also had a civilian culture that has always been ready to criticize military strategies and ambitions and even to replace military chiefs when it has thought fit. In some cases, most notoriously in Vietnam, these criticisms have resulted in hard-won military gains being abandoned, but over the long course of Western history they have produced military policies that have usually put the West on the winning side. Most importantly, this culture has meant the civilian population has been largely united behind the military effort. In short, Hanson argues that Western military dominance derives from its traditions of democracy, law, liberty, free markets, and free expression. Everything has sprung from these cultural attributes.

This is a bold argument that Hanson first advanced in 1989 with a book entitled *The Western Way of War*. In that work he argued for the origins of the Western concept of the "decisive battle" in the culture of the classical Greek city states. Tired of drawn-out, small-scale conflicts and skirmishes with their enemies to the east, the Greek cities assembled hoplite troops into an impenetrable formation, the phalanx, to challenge their rivals. The troops were highly-disciplined, property-owning, democratic-voting civilian farmers prepared to fight together to the death in one great battle on which they waged all. If they won, their enemy would be totally defeated and its forces completely dispersed. The victors could then go back to their farms to enjoy a long period of peace. Although they came from smaller states with poorer resources

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than their rivals, the hoplites prevailed over enemy soldiers who had little stake in the regimes for which they fought, who had to be either paid or flogged into battle, and who owed their allegiance to a tribe or to friends of the moment rather than to an enduring civic system that would preserve their values and the memory of their heroism.

That earlier book, however, would have been more accurately titled "The Greek Way of War," for while it is a richly researched and gruesomely realistic account of hoplite warfare, it never analyzed any form of Western conflict beyond that. When he wrote it, Hanson was a professor of classics at California State University, Fresno, working within his own specialized field. In the ensuing decade, however, he has grown into a military historian who can convincingly encompass the whole span of Western civilization, right up to the present. The result is a book that, in both scope and insight, is every bit as good as John Keegan's magisterial survey *A History of Warfare* (1993).

Hanson organizes *Carnage and Culture* so that his nine chosen battles illustrate each of the qualities of Western culture on which he makes his case. Some of his battles were decisive for the future of Western civilization, such as Salamis in 480 B.C., in which Athenian and Spartan allies defeated the Persian navy of Xerxes, then the most powerful ruler in the world. They ended the Persian monarch's threat to turn the Greek city states into Asian satraps that would have destroyed their peculiar institution of political freedom. The same was true of Poitiers in 732 A.D. where Charles Martel, deploying disciplined columns and rows of infantrymen inherited from classical antiquity, defeated the previously invincible cavalry of Abd ar-Rahman, thus curbing the advance of Islam into Europe.

Some other of Hanson's battles, however, did not alter the course of events even in the regions where they occurred. This was true of Cannae in 216 B.C. where the great general of Carthage, Hannibal, defeated a badly led Roman army. What was remarkable about Cannae, Hanson argues, is not that thousands of Romans were so easily massacred in battle, but that they were massacred to such little strategic effect. Within a year, Rome had organized a general muster of its able-bodied citizenry so that it could field new legions nearly as good as those that fell. Hannibal's success at Cannae, Hanson writes, resembled the Japanese surprise attack at Pearl Harbor: a brilliant tactical victory that had no strategic aftermath and only worked to galvanize the defeated. "The assemblies of Romans and Americans mobilized vast new armies after their embarrassments; the confident forces of the imperial war states of Carthage and Japan basked in their battle success and hardly grew."

Hanson's book is not simply an academic argument about Western military culture. He starts each of his chapters with a lengthy description of the action itself, of the military tactics involved and how they played themselves out, and of the "face of battle," what it felt like to fight and die there. He produces some of the frankest descriptions ever written about these events, especially in his account of the drowning of 40,000 Persian sailors at Salamis, the destruction of a force of 4000 Zulus by one hundred and thirty-nine British soldiers at Rorke's Drift in 1879, and the reduction of Japanese aircraft carriers to floating infernos by American dive bombers at Midway in 1942. The book's battle scenes alone make it a compelling read.

Even though the British publishers of the book have retitled it *Why the West Has Won*, Hanson's case is not that the West has always defeated its enemies. Among his nine battles are some spectacular Western defeats and withdrawals, such as Cannae in Italy and Tet in Vietnam. He also acknowledges that for a thousand years, from the fifth to the fifteenth centuries, European power declined after the fall of the Western Roman empire. He argues, however, that most states in Europe proper managed to retain the cultural traditions of classical antiquity

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over all this time, thus giving them a greater military power than their individual populations, resources, or territory would otherwise have allowed.

Nonetheless, I think many readers would have liked more detail about how the thesis fits this long decline, especially when the forces of Islam were seriously challenging much of eastern Europe. In this period, Europe did not enjoy an ascendancy in armaments. The horsemen of the Asian steppes developed the skill of firing arrows from horseback and changed the rules of cavalry engagement. And while Hanson's argument about the central role played by Western infantry discipline is persuasive, he does not discuss in any detail siege warfare, a practice that corresponds to almost the entire period he covers.

In the middle ages, Islam produced two military forces, the Egyptian Mamelukes and the Ottoman Janissaries, who showed that an army organized on authoritarian, bureaucratic lines could be more than a match for the medieval militarism of the West. In this period, Islam conquered the Christians of the Holy Land and Byzantium, driving them from the Middle East and seizing territory deep into the Hapsburg and Russian empires. Hanson has a very good chapter on the Battle of Lepanto which in 1571 put an end to this process and left the Ottoman Sultan the "sick man of Europe," but his thesis would have been more formidable had he discussed the clash between Islam and medieval Europe, when the latter was very much on the defensive.

While some of the author's Islamist critics might claim this omission leaves a large hole in his argument, Hanson would actually have little trouble in filling it. There have been several times in the past 2500 years when the West has abandoned its founding principles of liberty, democracy, and the rule of law and succumbed to absolutism. This is, I believe, the most plausible explanation of why both the Western and Eastern Romans lost their martial spirit and eventually their empires to the tribesmen of the German forests and the Asian steppes. Western absolutism produced Western decline. But since the Renaissance, when Europe began its revival of the original political culture of Greece and Rome, it has swept all before it. This is too big an issue to be mere coincidence and is one more confirmation of Hanson's daring and enticing thesis.

The uses of quietism

Laozi Dao De Jing:
The Book of the Way,
translated and with commentary by
Moss Roberts. University of
California Press, 149 pages, $22

reviewed by John Derbyshire

The connection between simple-life quietism and the political left has often been noted. Orwell, in his diatribes against the armchair progressives he so despised, never failed to include, along with Trotskyite poets, pamphleteering pacifists, and "pink" sodomites, the legions of sandal-wearing, vegetarian, teetotaling tree-huggers he knew so well from Independent Labour Party summer schools. Among my own acquaintances are two dear old friends in England, a married couple, who are left as left can be: keen readers of the *Guardian* (Britain's furthest-left broadsheet newspaper), hostile to nuclear weapons and nuclear power, anti-American and, while the U.S.S.R. existed, pro-Soviet, convinced that the troubles of the Middle East all result from the machinations of the oil companies, and so on. The wife was in fact a red-diaper baby: her parents were principals in the postwar Austrian Communist Party. They are both simple-lifers, who owned no television or car until well into their forties; he briefly ran a self-sufficient craft commune in rural Lincolnshire.

Homemade furniture and worship of state power; nutburgers and anti-Americanism: why this persistent connection? I think we all have a sketchy idea of how it

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hangs together. For deeper understanding, though, you could do worse than pick up the *Tao Te Ching*. A new annotated translation of this classic text of ancient Chinese quietism has just been produced by Moss Roberts, professor of Chinese at New York University.[1] Roberts's version of the *Tao Te Ching* raises the political issue with unusual clarity. Why this is so, and where, if anywhere, the trail leads, are matters I shall return to presently. First, some background on the *Tao Te Ching*.

I imagine the one thing that everyone knows about the *Tao Te Ching* is that it was written by a sage named Lao Tzu. This is, in point of fact, the thing least worth knowing. Lao Tzu may or may not have existed; and, supposing he existed, he may or may not have written the *Tao Te Ching*. We simply have no idea, nor any way to pursue the matter. We have no accounts of Lao Tzu by people who knew him, nor any knowledge of his relationships with other writers of his time (most likely the later fifth or early fourth century B.C., if he existed). There are some stories about him, but they all have an apocryphal quality to them. There is even a thumbnail biography by the historian Sima Qian, "the Chinese Herodotus," but it was written at least two centuries, and a huge national convulsion, after the latest date at which Lao Tzu could have lived, if he lived, and is not supported by any other evidence. Lao Tzu is a blank, a mystery.

Which is entirely fitting, because the *Tao Te Ching* is fundamentally a work of mysticism. Organized as eighty-one stanzas of mixed verse and prose, it includes material on several different topics: self-cultivation, statecraft, military science, health. All this, however, is set in a metaphysical framework, and the metaphysics is of the mystical type, with principal elements that accord with the mystical truths revealed in other times and places, and that will be familiar to anyone who has looked into mysticism of any school. We are given to understand that there is an all-embracing law or spirit called the Tao (that is, the Way), which is supreme in the universe and governs the workings of nature. There is a corresponding spirit moving human beings, named Te (that is, Virtue—this word is pronounced "duh"). Tao and Te work together in one of those dualities the ancient Chinese thinkers were so fond of, like Heaven and Earth, *yin* and *yang*, gods and demons, *ren* (benevolence) and *yi* (righteousness), or the prince and the minister—those last two dualities much worked over by Confucius. The interaction of these dualities generates all the phenomena of the so-called "real world." Both Tao and Te are essentially ineffable, but by certain spiritual exercises we can attain enough acquaintance with them to improve our lives, our government, our military prowess, and even apparently our health. These exercises center on the cultivation of something called *wu-wei*, which translators have variously rendered as "non-action," "unattached action," "Non-Ado," "not-doing," and so on. Here are the first lines of Stanza 48 in Moss Roberts's translation:

> To pursue learning, learn more day by day;
> To pursue the Way, unlearn it day by day:
> Unlearn and then unlearn again
> Until there is nothing to pursue;
> No end pursued, no end ungained.

These precepts are explicitly enjoined upon the rulers of states, who are assured that if they practice *wu-wei* on their subjects' behalf, then tranquility, harmony, and sufficiency will result. Dr. Johnson said that George the First "knew nothing, and desired to know nothing; did nothing, and desired to do nothing." This, apparently, would be the ideal Taoist ruler.

The political "tendency" of the *Tao Te Ching* at first looks to be reactionary in the extreme. Boats, carriages, and mechanical contrivances of all kinds are condemned as

1 Professor Roberts has used the most popular current method for transliterating Chinese, in which an unapostrophized "t" becomes a "d" and an unapostrophized "ch" often becomes a "j."

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deplorably new-fangled, hindrances to the peace of mind of the common people. Even writing is objected to:

> Guide them back to early times,
> When knotted chords served for signs.
> [Stanza 80]

The people are, in fact, to be kept as ignorant as possible:

> Thus under a wise man's rule
> Blank are their minds
> But full their bellies. [Stanza 3]

Talk about the simple life!

These lines are uncharacteristically explicit, though. Most of the *Tao Te Ching* is written in an enigmatic style that occasionally defies translation altogether, even by experts. "There is no consensus on the first two lines of this stanza," Roberts admits in his annotation of Stanza 10. For another instance, consider the famous couplet that opens Stanza 38. In Chinese: *Shang de bu de, Shi-yi you de*—literally "Upper virtue not virtue, Therefore has virtue." Say what? (Roberts: "High virtue by obliging not/ Acquires moral force.")

Part of the problem is in the nature of the classical Chinese language. In its earliest form—the form employed in the *Tao Te Ching*, and by all the other great philosophers—written Chinese was extremely abbreviated in its syntax. Even modern Chinese people cannot read the language of the classics easily without special training. The purpose of early written Chinese was really mnemonic—to help one recall matter acquired by oral transmission, not to tell you something you didn't know before.

This makes for an extremely short-winded form of presentation. In book one, chapter nine of the *Analects* of Confucius, for example, we read the four-character injunction: *Shen zhong zhui yuan*. Legge translates this as: "Let there be a careful attention to perform the funeral rites to parents, and let them be followed when long gone with the ceremonies of sacrifice"—a syllable-to-syllable ratio of very nearly one to ten. (It would be about one to six in modern colloquial Chinese.) Burton Watson, in the introduction to his invaluable handbook *Early Chinese Literature*, emits the following sigh of exasperation: "Is it too much to ask that the writer indicate at least the subject of the sentence? . . . In the case of classical Chinese the answer is usually, yes."

One consequence of all this minimalism is that translators can "color" their work in many different ways. Dr. Ching-Hsiung Wu, for example, who was a Catholic (he served as Minister Plenipotentiary to the Holy See under Chiang Kai-shek's government on Taiwan), produced a version of the *Tao Te Ching* in 1961 that has been very popular with Christians:

> . . . only he who is willing to give his body
> for the sake of the world is fit to be
> entrusted with the world.
> Only he who can do it with love is worthy of
> being the steward of the world.
> [Stanza 13]

Similarly, Witter Bynner's *The Way of Life According to Laotzu* (1944) reflects his own pacifism, the more strongly felt because his country was at war: "the way for a vital man to go is not the way of a soldier" (Stanza 31).

Moss Roberts's view is that the book should be taken mainly as a treatise on statecraft. Thus where, in the first line of Stanza 41, other translators render *shang shi* as "scholars of the highest class" (Legge), "men of stamina" (Bynner), "a wise scholar" (Wu) or "superior students" (Muller), Roberts says: "men of service." Similarly with the passage "Block all exchanges, shut all doors" in Stanza 52. Other translators take this as a command to withdraw from social intercourse, the better to cultivate oneself, but Roberts sees it as in line with other instructions to the ruler to keep his people ignorant.

This business of keeping the people ignorant has now turned up twice in this piece, and is critical to an understanding of Taoism's political consequences. At first

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sight it is difficult to fathom how a doctrine so mystical, quietist, and extremely reactionary could have any political consequences at all. In ancient China, though, wellnigh the only available employment for men of letters was as advisors to the princes who ruled the petty kingdoms of that time, and who were engaged in a constant and unblinking struggle for mastery over each other. A philosopher who had nothing to say about statecraft could get no hearing, and so all the schools had political consequences. Those that flowed from the *Tao Te Ching* were of particular importance, and the most important of them all was the development of Legalism.

Legalism is traditionally supposed to have been thought up by a gentleman with the title Lord of Shang, who lived 390–338 B.C. and served as an advisor to Count Xiao, ruler of the state of Qin in northwest China. To place the origins of Legalism with this person, though, is certainly an over-simplification, and the so-called *Book of Lord Shang* (there is an English translation, originally published in 1928, by J.J.L. Duyvendak) is for the most part a later forgery. There are, however, good reasons to think that it offers a fairly true picture of the means by which Lord Shang reformed Qin and set it on the path that led its rulers to the conquest of all China, the last of those rulers styling himself "First Emperor" in 221 B.C. The *Book of Lord Shang* preaches totalitarianism with breathtaking frankness. One of its sections has the title "Weakening the People." In another place it lists ten evils the wise ruler should shun: they include virtue, integrity, and music. It was, beyond any doubt, by dint of these odious doctrines that China was first united on roughly the scale that is familiar to us today.

And yet, if you read the *Book of Lord Shang*, you see showing clearly through its harsh precepts the quietism and restraint of the *Tao Te Ching*. "Weakening the People," for example, sounds dreadful to modern man—to "we, the people"—but is a fair extension of the meaning of *rou*, one of the key terms in the *Tao Te Ching*, which can mean "meek," "gentle," or "restrained" as well as "weak." It is as if, starting from the proposition that "the meek shall inherit the earth," one were to argue that a state under a strong central leader, whose people were kept meek and submissive, could conquer a mighty empire. Which, in fact, is what the book does argue, and what in fact happened! And how are the people to be kept in that meek, submissive state? By an inflexible system of rewards and punishments, explicitly endorsed in Stanza 74 of the *Tao Te Ching*:

> If they are in constant fear of death
> And we seize and put to death
> Committers of crimes, then who would dare?

The horrid doctrines of Legalism attained their finished form in the teaching of Han Fei Tzu (280–233 B.C.). In opposition to Confucius's yearning for traditional hierarchies and to the more meritocratic schemes of post-Confucian thinkers like Mo Tzu, Han Fei Tzu proposed a state organized around a system of laws so all-embracing and correct that it required no elites at all to administer, nor even a very active monarch—*wu-wei* enthroned, or, to recast it in terms of a somewhat later thinker, the state withered away. Henri Maspero, in his survey of the period titled *China in Antiquity* (1978), discusses Legalism in a chapter headed "Schools Derived from Taoism," and concludes his account of Han Fei Tzu as follows:

> The doctrine of Han Fei, and that of the Legalists in general, tended to lower still further the position of the individual life, so little developed in ancient China and so constantly sacrificed to the life of society. . . . The theories of the Legalists, applied by the [Qin] dynasty to the government of the empire, had a great influence . . . upon the formation of the modern Chinese mind.

The *Tao Te Ching* has been a great favorite with translators. Witter Bynner, living in a provincial Mexican town during World War II, seems to have had no difficulty acquiring

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fourteen different English translations, to which he then added his own version. Fourteen, though of course a different fourteen, was also the count on the shelves at my local Barnes & Noble, a perfectly humdrum suburban chain bookstore, last weekend. The only attempt at a methodical tally of English translations that I have been able to locate is one performed in the early 1980s by Clark Melling, a scholar at the University of New Mexico. He listed forty-two, but I feel sure that is an undercount. In any case, there are certainly many more than that now. A quick trawl through book sites on the internet suggests sixty as a lower bound, but more diligent inquiry might come up with a larger number. Some of these are high-, if not best-, sellers: my copy of the aforementioned Dr. Wu's translation is in the tenth printing by its second publisher; the version put out by its first publisher went to at least eighteen printings. That internet search also revealed a wide variety of "spin-off" books, applying themes from the *Tao Te Ching* to subjects as disparate as child-raising, cooking, drumming, sex, and nuclear physics. Plainly there is a huge market for Taoism among Americans of our time.

The reason for this probably lies in the obscurity of the language, which allows the *Tao Te Ching* to serve its readers as a "mirror" text—one into which they can project their own hopes and fears, rather like a newspaper horoscope. The psychological processes involved here were drawn very well by Tom Wolfe in his 1998 novel *A Man in Full*. One of Wolfe's characters is Conrad Hensley, a thoughtfull but ill-educated and unformed young man who by chance encounters the works of Epictetus and soon becomes a proselytizing Stoic. In an age like ours, when many people—probably most people—reach adulthood without ever having passed through any strict moral education deeper than the vapidities of "political correctness," there is bound to be a demand for such products. Given that demand, it is not very surprising that few of those who have been visited by the temptation to make a translation of the *Tao Te Ching* seem to have been able to restrain themselves, to practice *wu-wei*. The nature of the book itself strengthens the temptation. For one thing, it is not very long—only five-thousand characters. Suppose you didn't know any Chinese, but knew how to use a Chinese dictionary (an impossible state of affairs, as it happens, but let's suppose); if you spent five minutes looking up and figuring out the syntactical significance of every single character, you could get the whole job done in three months of forty-hour weeks. Bynner, who could not read Chinese at all, in fact took an even more audacious approach, simply "distilling" the essence of as many other translations as he could find. If you do actually know Chinese, translating the *Tao Te Ching* is a fairly minor undertaking. Moss Roberts has previously published a translation of the fourteenth-century novel *Three Kingdoms*, at 650,000 characters a task 130 times more daunting.

The pity of all these translations is, of course, that none of them can convey the poetry of the *Tao Te Ching*. There is no way that I can do this, either. I can only suggest that you find a Chinese speaker with a good stage voice and have him or her declaim one of the more sonorous passages to give you some flavor of the book as it has appealed to a hundred generations of Chinese enthusiasts. The tremendous, high-soaring and deep-diving Stanza 21 would be a good choice:

> Boundless virtue all-accepting
> Attends the Way, the Way alone.
> Assuming form, the Way reveals
> Shapes half-seen and then half-hid.
> In dark half-hid, a likening;
> In light half-dark, forms visible . . .

It is melancholy, and slightly disturbing, to realize that these passive, mystical doctrines, expressed with such beauty and vigor, helped set in motion a system of despotism that lasted almost unchanged for two-thousand years, and of which the Chinese people have not been able to rid themselves

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to this day. Yet after all, is it not in the Great Harmony, the universal City of the Sun, the Dictatorship of the Proletariat, where all are uniform and all submissive, where all votes are unanimous and all controversy stilled, that "non-action" finds its truest fulfillment? Strange are the uses of quietism.

Much virtue in "if"

Katherine Duncan-Jones
Ungentle Shakespeare:
Scenes from his Life.
Thomas Learning, 332 pages, £20

reviewed by Paul Dean

Katherine Duncan-Jones must be granted a certain originality. There cannot be many Shakespeare scholars who combine a refusal to accept that Hand D in the manuscript of *Sir Thomas More* has been demonstrated beyond reasonable doubt to be Shakespeare's, with a willingness to believe that he might have been part-author of a run-of-the-mill domestic drama of c. 1605 called *A Yorkshire Tragedy*. When, moreover, we find Duncan-Jones misquoting the editors of the latter play—attributing to them the statement that "there is very strong evidence" for Shakespeare's authorship when they actually say "there is *apparently* very strong *external* evidence" (italics added)—and failing to acknowledge that they are not persuaded by this evidence, we are less than impressed. This curious combination of wariness and rashness occurs elsewhere in *Ungentle Shakespeare*. She refrains, for example, from deciding whether Shakespeare was a Protestant or a Catholic, but is willing to believe that he may have had a sexual relationship with the Earl of Southampton.

Her title strikes the keynote. Shakespeare was "ungentle": a social upstart, a sexual opportunist, and mean with his money. He was eager to escape the cares of marriage and fatherhood for bachelor lodgings and distinctly cool towards his native town. Duncan-Jones's account of his last illness and death is every bit as unpleasant as Edward Bond's in his terrifying play *Bingo*. Syphilitic, troubled with heart and circulation problems, Shakespeare takes to the bottle, falls out with old friends, insults the beneficiaries in his will, and causes a curse to be carved on his tomb in order to keep his widow out. Sweet swan of Avon? Well, swans have nasty tempers.

Duncan-Jones warns us, "I quite often risk conjecture" and that her approach is "more thematic than narrative," each chapter comprising "a collection of short related essays" on key topics. The result is a lively read, whose strengths and weaknesses can be best appreciated by those already well versed in Shakespeare's biography. The speculations work well in contexts in which she can build on accepted evidence, as with her treatment of the uneasy professional relationship between Shakespeare and Ben Jonson. Jonson described Shakespeare, in *Discoveries*, as "honest, and of an open and free nature," a disconcerting quotation of Iago's contemptuous verdict on Othello. Duncan-Jones persuasively suggests that Shakespeare repaid Jonson's acerbities through the character of Jacques in *As You Like It*, who, like Jonson, is "a satirist with a murky past, who believes himself nevertheless perfectly entitled to anatomize the follies and vices of others," an oppositional figure whose sudden conversion at the end of the play recalls Jonson's rapidly acquired Catholic faith a year or so earlier. We can accept this as plausible without insisting that Jacques is a full-fledged portrait of Jonson or turning the play into a clumsy allegory of the contemporary literary scene.

Jonson was not Shakespeare's only rival, of course, and one aspect of Shakespeare's career that this book well brings out is his place in a complicated nexus of playwrights, all jockeying for position, influence, and audience approval. Early threats from Marlowe, Nashe, Kyd, and Greene were succeeded by challenges from Marston and Middleton. Indeed, Duncan-Jones feels that Shakespeare may have collaborated with Marston, whose family was a sponsor of

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Shakespeare's cousin, Thomas Greene, when he entered the Inns of Court. The puzzling relationship between *Hamlet* and Marston's *Antonio's Revenge* may be best accounted for by a kind of teasing, friendly rivalry, further symbolized by the fact that Marston's title *What You Will* became the alternative title to *Twelfth Night*. There were outright collaborations late in Shakespeare's career with John Fletcher, and Duncan-Jones supports less firm evidence that gives Thomas Middleton a share in *Timon of Athens* and the disreputable George Wilkins one in *Pericles* (to which she would add *A Yorkshire Tragedy*).

These were pragmatic rather than affectionate ventures; Duncan-Jones's Shakespeare remains a cold fish, litigious and quarrelsome. We know more of his legal and financial affairs than of almost any other aspect of his life. In 1612 he was chief witness in a legal dispute between a young couple, the Belotts, and the wife's father, Christopher Mountjoy, in whose house Shakespeare had lodged while the marriage was being negotiated. Duncan-Jones imagines him resenting the time it took, chafing at keeping company with ordinary people. The trial over, his connection with the parties apparently ended; it was not worth his trouble, we surmise, since he "stood to gain nothing personally."

Ungentle Shakespeare does not bring the life and the work closer, since the Shakespeare it depicts seems no more likely to have written the plays than that of any other biographer. It will come as no surprise that the tragedies receive proportionately more attention than the rest, but in many ways the most interesting discussion is of *The Tempest*. Duncan-Jones revives the traditional autobiographical reading, with a new twist. Reworking Marlowe's *Dr. Faustus* (the name means the same as Prospero, and the play had been reprinted in 1609) in a more benign mode, Shakespeare used the skills of a large troupe of boy actors, playing Miranda, Ariel, and the numerous spirits of the illusions, for the only time in his career. Prospero/Shakespeare acts out a dream of absolutist control over boys compelled to obey him, chastening adults who would rebel against him. His greatest love, Duncan-Jones claims, is for Ariel (this seems to distort the importance of Miranda), and his renunciation of power coincides with Ariel's psychological puberty and freedom:

> As in the closing "fair youth" poem of the *Sonnets* [no. 126], loss of power is expressed in terms of the ending of a relationship with a "lovely Boy." As Shakespeare's public literary career had opened with an exploration of doomed love for a "tender boy" (Adonis), so it closed.

A footnote at this point invokes the ending of Mann's *Death in Venice* as a suggestive analogue. That, we may feel, is going too far, but the speculation here has a haunting, mythical quality. Shakespeare's inner life may have been so profound that he had no need for much of an outer one. We are all left guessing, and muttering, with Touchstone, "Much virtue in 'If.'"

Classroom politics

Mark Lilla The Reckless Mind: Intellectuals in Politics.
New York Review of Books,
216 pages, $24.95

reviewed by Mark Bauerlein

In 1955, twenty-nine year old Michel Foucault accepted a teaching post in Uppsala, Sweden. Isolated for three years, he began gathering strands of medical texts, seventeenth-century philosophy, intellectual history, and Nietzsche into what would become his first major work, *Madness and Civilization*. Sixteen years later, now a famous professor, Foucault joined Noam Chomsky in a French television studio for a debate on the upheavals of the day. There, he stated:

> When the proletariat takes power, it may be

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> quite possible that the proletariat will exert toward the classes over which it has triumphed a violent, dictatorial, and even bloody power. I can't see what objection could possibly be made to this.

This kind of thing happened all too often in the twentieth century, argues Mark Lilla in his sober profile of six philosophers and their dabblings in politics. Each chapter selects a figurehead—Heidegger, Carl Schmitt, Walter Benjamin, Alexandre Kojève, Foucault, Derrida—and recreates two settings. First, we have the mind of the thinker, the classroom, the friendships, in sum the scholarly world in which the philosophy evolved and influenced a generation of students. Then, we have the political climate, events like the rise of Nazism, to which the thinkers brought their philosophy and, sad to say, voiced some of the most fatuous, repugnant, and deluded opinions of modern times.

The evidence is plain, and embarrassing to acolytes still peddling theories and tendencies derived from the thinkers in humanities departments. These are influential figures in academe, and it is jarring to watch them go public and, intoxicated by the winds of revolution and their own eminence, become apologists for tyranny and anarchy, bidding one Messiah or another to regenerate the times.

Heidegger is the obvious first choice. He rose to prominence in the university in the 1920s, combining esoteric phenomenological analysis with an uncompromising pose of intense reflection. His subject was Being, the most metaphysical and elusive—yet near—of things, summoned from the portentous sayings of pre-Socratic reverie. As his student and lover Hannah Arendt remembered, "the name traveled all over Germany like the rumor of the hidden king. . . . The rumor about Heidegger put it quite simply: Thinking has come to life again." With the publication of *Being and Time* in 1927, Heidegger stood as the most renowned mind in Europe, ranked with Descartes and Kant in the history of philosophy.

Then came the invitation to become rector of Freiburg University. In 1933 he joined the Nazi Party and toured Germany giving propaganda lectures punctuated by "Heil Hitler!" After reading Heidegger's Rectoral Address, Karl Lowith wondered whether "he was supposed to study the pre-Socratics or march with the storm troopers." When Lowith met him in Rome in 1936, Lilla reports, Heidegger was sporting a Nazi lapel pin. After a lecture in Heidelberg, he warned his friend Karl Jaspers of "a dangerous international network of Jews."

These facts are widely known in Europe, and Lilla doesn't belabor the episode. But he does emphasize Heidegger's post-War outlook and its bizarre visions. After the German surrender, Heidegger entered a sanatorium, faced a denazification commission, and was banned from teaching. Trading Fascist enthusiasm for "serene renunciation," Heidegger converted defeat into an epochal condition. "Now all was lost," Lilla imagines him thinking, "Being had withdrawn and was nowhere to be found." Surrounded by mass technology and craven politics, he composed mystical essays filled with gods, peasants, and poetry, wrote letters to Jaspers pleading for an "advent" that would revive Germany, and to Arendt stating that "The world is growing bleaker . . . the essence of history ever more mysterious. . . . Still despite growing external threats in everything, I see the arrival of new—or, better yet—old 'secrets.'" He told a *Der Spiegel* interviewer, "Only a god can save us now."

These are more than the addled ramblings of a disgraced professor. They bear the traits of what is common to all Lilla's subjects: a "reckless mind." The reckless mind has extraordinary powers of reason, but harbors a love of irrationality. It conceives bewitching critiques of reality and truth, attracting readers and students, but despises norms of communication. It talks about justice and history and Man, but from the precipice, ratcheting them up to crisis tensions, where only the intervention of the genius can handle them. It loathes

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average humanity and everyday life, from the "idle talk" of the "they" to the comforts of "bourgeois normality." It covets academic prestige, but courts the "limit situation," the transgressive thought and act, unmediated contact with the divine or the anti-divine.

Lilla's figures provide different versions. Lamenting the spiritual emptiness of modernity, Benjamin pursued the "creative word of God" and a "higher concept of experience," proposing to "behave always radically and never logically when it came to the most important things." Kojève found in the master-slave dialectic of Hegel the key to all history and society, and he mesmerized Jacques Lacan, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Raymond Aron, and others with dazzling lectures in Paris in the 1930s. Foucault directed his studies to breaking down the distinctions of modern society, between law and crime, sanity and madness, natural and perverse, passing deviancy off as rebellion. Derrida conceived of deconstruction as a nonstop critique of "logocentrism," provoking, he claimed, "a new tremor or new shock of the body that opens a new space of experience."

In the classroom or the quarterly, reckless minds appear as renegade heroes, giving students that heady rush of joining a scholarly vanguard or watching the Establishment fall. But reckless minds have larger ambitions. Here is what they did: Benjamin became a Marxist in the mid-Twenties, and though he drifted after traveling to Moscow, hearing of the show trials, and learning that a former lover had been shipped to the gulag, he never criticized Stalin publicly. After the War, Kojève whimsically called himself the "conscience of Stalin" and argued that "modern tyranny (he has the Soviet Union in mind) might advance the work of history and prepare the way for a better future" (Lilla's words). Foucault relished late-Sixties radicalism and advocated a "popular justice" that differed little from mob rule. When the Iranian revolution erupted in 1978, Foucault visited Tehran and extolled the "religion of combat and sacrifice." After thirty years of apolitical work, Derrida published six books in the Nineties on political themes. His argument, in Lilla's words: "the real source of tyranny is not tyrants, or guns, or wicked institutions. Tyranny begins in the *language* of tyranny." Therefore, we fight tyranny with a linguistic critique—in Derrida's words, "*deconstruction is justice*."

Lilla interprets these examples as part of a dismaying trend in twentieth-century history: "philotyranny." However briefly, thinkers embraced Hitler, admired Stalin, Mao, and Castro. But to label their motives "philotyranny" grants them more political content than they deserve. As Lilla explains, philosophers acted out of irresponsible, confused impulses. Benjamin never reconciled his spiritualism and Marxism enough to develop a coherent political outlook. Kojève spent twenty years as a French bureaucrat, indifferent to whether American capitalism or Soviet communism won out. Foucault's statements are haphazard and provocative, expressions of anarchy and self-destructiveness, not Fascism. Derrida's remarks on justice smack more of self-love than tyranny-love.

These pieces on the disparate failings of prized thinkers don't fit one motive. They were first published in *The New York Review of Books* and the *TLS*, and bear the earmarks of edgy commentary and selective analysis. Nevertheless, Lilla has isolated a problem with Continental thinking in the "restless" vein: it yields a politics that is apocalyptic, disruptive, messianic. Derrida terms justice "a structural messianism, a messianism without religion, even a messianic without messianism." No messy worries about local bosses, property rights, state senators redrawing districts. Reckless minds want sweeping transformation, not incremental progress. Just as they cast their philosophy as clearing away metaphysical rubbish, dismantling the Platonic tradition, and eliminating distinctions of reason and unreason, so too they foresee a politics of cataclysm. According to them, it can't be any other way. Derrida again:

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> For democracy remains to come; this is its essence in so far as it remains; not only will it remain indefinitely perfectible . . . but, belonging to the time of the promise, it will always remain, in each of its future times, to come: even when there is democracy, it never exists.

Reading that sentence, one adjusts one's judgment. This and other "reckless" opinions aren't messianic politics. They aren't political at all. They're just the flighty outbursts of thinkers who should stick to the classroom and the archive.

Wellington, well done

Rory Muir Salamanca, 1812.
Yale University Press, 322 pages, $35

reviewed by Robert Messenger

On the evening of August 16, 1812, the publisher Charles Knight was at his desk attempting to write a "death-song" for a Spanish guerilla when he heard the 29th regiment leave its barracks in Windsor. With band playing, the soldiers marched into central London, and Knight joined the cheering crowd that surrounded them. "I followed the measured tramp of the soldiery, in common with the great mass of our population, unknowing what was to be done, and yet filled with the passionate desire of the hundreds around me to give expression to the belief that the tide had turned—that England might shout for a mighty victory by land, as she had shouted for the Nile and Trafalgar."

It was the night that news reached London of the victory at Salamanca. In the days that followed, bells were rung across the land, a prayer of thanks was read in every church in England and Ireland, and Lord Liverpool's weak government called a snap election to take advantage of its new popularity. Salamanca was Wellington's finest victory, but, if it is remembered today at all, it is always overshadowed by Waterloo, a battle that the French lost far more than the British won.

In 1812, Wellington had already been at war in the Peninsula for four years. That May, he invaded Castile to attack the French "Army of Portugal" under Marshal Marmont. The youngest of Napoleon's marshals, Marmont was a skillful but unlucky commander. (Known by his title Duc de Raguse, his lasting achievement seems to have been to add the word *raguser* ["to betray"] to the French language, alluding to his betrayal of his friend Napoleon in 1814.)

With armies of just under 50,000 men each, the two began a campaign of flanking movements and retreats. On the morning of July 22, Marmont mistakenly thought that Wellington's army was in retreat and that there was but a single division left as cover. Anxious to maul this rearguard, he sent two of his divisions in a rapid maneuver. The leading one overextended the French left and created a gap between itself and the following division. Wellington recognized a golden opportunity. Two of his infantry divisions engaged and broke the isolated French left and then the heavy dragoons of John Le Marchant crashed into the disordered and confused French infantry and turned them into a fleeing rabble that no commander could hope to rally. In forty-five minutes, the left wing of the French army had simply ceased to exist.

The British attacks on the French middle were initially repulsed, but Wellington's reserves, suffering heavily, broke the French again and the battle became a rout. The French were saved from complete destruction only by darkness and Spanish cowardice. Unknown to Wellington, his Spanish allies had abandoned the fortress at Alba de Tormes and so the French were able to escape across the river. Even so, three days later the "Army of Portugal" could only muster 20,000 troops. It was the worst French defeat since the Annus Horribilis of 1799, and the war that Napoleon thought would cost him 12,000 casualties had become, in his own words, an "ulcer," which cost him 240,000 by the end.

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The historian Rory Muir set out simply to retell the story of this landmark battle in detail. This proved surprisingly difficult to do. The primary sources all tell a slightly different story. He discovered that it is next to impossible to know exactly what happened at any moment of the battle. Historians, Mr. Muir points out,

> write of the troops returning volley for volley at little more than ten yards, not because any source says it about this encounter, but because they believe that this was what often happened. But in fact few first-hand accounts ever write of combat in these terms; rather, the idea gets copied from one secondary source to another, developing credibility simply through repetition. This in turn leads to further absurdities, such as overly bold calculations that X number of infantry fired Y number of shots, of casualties, which means . . . absolutely nothing, for every step in such calculations is built on sand, because the sources are not that precise or reliable, even if, for once, two accounts agree on what happened.

In *Salamanca*, Mr. Muir has laid out all of the primary material and sorted out what we can know, what we can surmise, and what we can merely guess about the events at Salamanca on July 22, 1812. He breaks the battle down into its component parts and devotes a chapter to narrating each. At the end of each chapter is a "Commentary" section, where like a Sherlock Holmes he discusses the validity of the evidence and offers multiple interpretations of the events. He is also marvelous on such topics as cowardice under fire, battlefield medical care, the treatment of prisoners, the difficulties of keeping men in formation, and so on. Mr. Muir's goal, stated in the preface, is "to show the reader the historian's building site before the scaffolding has been taken down, the tools put away and the debris swept out of sight." He succeeds admirably. I was fascinated from start to finish, though, I must admit, the historiographical case studies may ruin the narrative for some readers.

Wellington and the Peninsular War have been extremely well-served by historians. Southey's 1830 history of the war is still readable and quite balanced, though it was quickly overshadowed by Sir William Napier's five-volume work (1834–40), which was notably for both dramatic flair and its author's tremendous biases. (Napier had served as a regimental officer throughout the war.) Napier was in turn superseded by Sir Charles Oman's seven-volume *History of the Peninsular War* (1902–1930), one of the greatest works of narrative history that I know. Kept in print by the marvelous Greenhill Press, it remains a vital work, ranking with Gibbon and Grote. More recent works by Jac Weller, Michael Glover—his concise and superb *Wellington as Military Commander* (1968) was just reissued as a Penguin paperback—Ian Fletcher, and Michael Oliver and Richard Partridge together have all made major contributions. Rory Muir's *Salamanca* is another.

The Battle of Salamanca plays a large role in most accounts of the Peninsula. Foy, probably the best of the French generals there, left a vivid description in his memoirs of how the battle and Wellington impressed themselves on him:

> It raises Wellington almost to the heights of the Duke of Marlborough. Previously one recognized his prudence, his choice of positions, his ability in using them; at Salamanca he showed himself a great and able manoeuvrer; he kept his dispositions hidden almost all day; he watched our movements in order to determine his own; he fought in oblique order; it was like one of Frederick the Great's battles.

High praise, but I prefer Napier's eyewitness description of the great man at day's end: "More than a rival of Marlborough, since he had defeated greater generals than Marlborough ever encountered, with a prescient pride he seemed only to accept his glory as an earnest of greater things."

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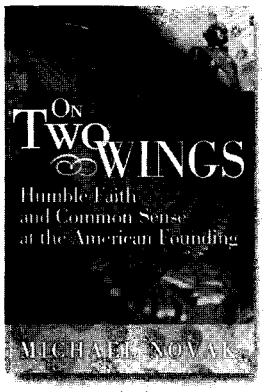
Faith at the Founding



ISBN: 1-893554-34-1
$23.95, 239 pages

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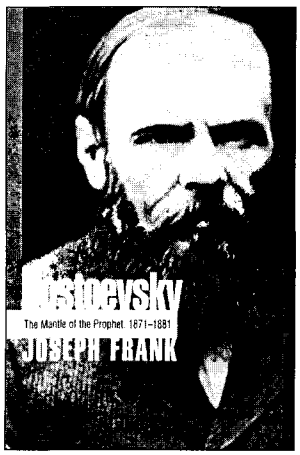

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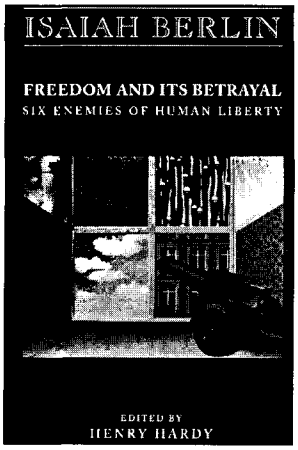

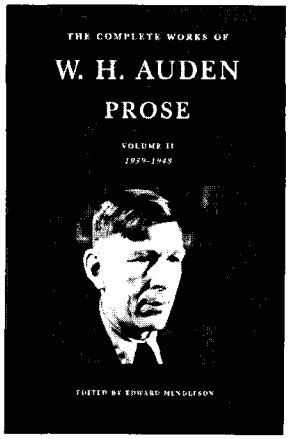

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